

**SOCIALIST'S QUEST
FOR
THE RIGHT PATH**

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S. M. JOSHI



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FOREWORD

Ever since the formation of the Socialist Party there has been a constant quest for a correct socialist policy in the context of Indian situation. This job was left to our leaders who had all India stature during these years upto the split and a little later also. But soon there came a time when these leaders were no more with us. Some of them left us and others were snatched away by the cruel hand of death. Those of us who remained behind were not groomed for this task, and yet they had to think for themselves and grope for the right path. In 1963 I was called upon to become the chairman of the party and I continued to bear that burden till the beginning of 1969. During this critical period I, in my humble way, tried to do my best in this regard. My speeches at the various conventions, both in the P.S.P. and the S.S.P. and the articles that I wrote during this period are the fruit of that endeavour. Now that the socialist unity has been achieved some of my colleagues thought that it might be useful to bring out these speeches and articles in the form of a book. I am grateful to the Sindhu Publications for undertaking this publication.

I have been greatly helped in the preparation of these speeches and articles by my friend and colleague Shri B. N. Rajhans. During all this period he has been with me in my tours and we had the opportunity to discuss the problems involved and views expressed in these speeches and articles. In fact some of the articles, those concerning the situation in Purnea and North East India are prepared by him, for which I owe him my thanks. I also take this opportunity to express my sense of gratitude to my colleague Shri Bhai Vaidya who has been kind enough to go through the proofs.

S. M. Joshi

CONTENTS

1. Building For An Alternative Focus	1
2. Rise To The Occasion	20
3. On The Move	33
4. Lessons Of Naxalbari	53
5. Mobilise The Masses	58
6. Explosive Situation In Purnea	71
7. Democratic Aspirations Of the North East Region	78
8. Can We Build An Alternative ?	105
9. The Way To Socialist Alternative	110
10. The Shape Of Things To Come	118
11. Towards Socialist Unity	124
12. Choice Before Socialists	136
13. A New Direction For Socialist Party	142
14. Challenge For The Socialists	151
15. Forging Mass Sanctions	156
16. Satyagrah Only Way To Goal	161
17. S. S. P. Leadership And Mass Awakening	166
18. Election Strategy For Socialists	169
19. Socialists At The Cross Roads	173
20. Constructive Combatism	182

CHAPTER 1

BUILDING FOR AN ALTERNATIVE FOCUS

THE SITUATION that obtains today is worse than the one that existed at the time when we met at Bhopal last year. The country is passing through an unprecedented crisis. The humiliation caused by the reverses suffered on the northern borders is still gnawing at the nation's heart. Thousands of square miles of our territory have been occupied or are under the control of the enemy whom we, not long ago, fondly believed to be our brother. The partitioning of our country was agreed to by our leaders in 1947 in the hope that Pakistanis would bury the hatchet once they realised their aspiration for a separate state. Unfortunately those hopes have been belied. The rulers of Pakistan have not only continued to promote hatred against India but have joined hands with our enemy, the Chinese Communists. Non-Muslim minorities in East Pakistan are being subjected to brutal treatment. The Pak intention is obvious. They want to disturb the even tenor of our secular life, to upset our socio-economic progress, and, if possible, to subvert the integrity of our country.

The inability of the Government of India to secure effectively the rights of non-Muslim minorities in East Pakistan, coupled with their unwillingness to deal firmly with the Pakistani infiltrators in Assam, is causing resentment among the people. On the top of this the Kashmir situation has become alarming. Meeting at this crucial hour in the nation's history the Praja Socialist Party has a certain responsibility and we have to discharge it in a manner befitting our traditions.

I profoundly regret the absence of many of my valued comrades at this conference. They have parted company with us because they think that the policy we adopted at Bhopal is not in the interest of the country. They feel that our assessment of the situation is wrong. On the contrary, an overwhelming majority in our Party is firmly convinced that their policy is disastrous

from the point of view of the interests of the toiling masses and harmful to the future of democratic socialism itself. When contrary opinions are held so sincerely and steadfastly on either side, the parting of ways becomes inevitable and one should have no quarrel about it. One should allow everybody to go his own way without the least bitterness and ill-will and hope for the best. That the parting of ways should occur during my tenure causes me particular grief, but I must bear it with all the fortitude I can command. Last year it was only a sense of duty that impelled me to accept the responsibility of this exalted office. I am conscious of the fact that the burden is too heavy and the changing situation in the country makes it heavier. Nevertheless I was confident that I would get your whole-hearted co-operation and generous indulgence. I gratefully acknowledge the ample measure in which both these were given.

After the reverses in the General Elections of 1962 a mood of helplessness and despondency prevailed in the rank and file of the Party. That feeling became all the more acute when the then Chairman expressed his desire to lay down the reins of office. In his opinion, the Party was rejected by the people and therefore he conselled its winding up. However, most of his colleagues and the Party workers disagreed with him. According to them, in this country today the result of the poll is a very dubious test of ascertaining the attitude of the people. The Patna meeting of the General Council, therefore, reiterated its faith in the creed of democratic socialism and pledged itself anew to shoulder the task in a spirit of rededication. It was realised that without patient work, both combative and constructive, among the people, it would be futile to talk of socialist revolution. Our party was not, and must never be, a purely parliamentary party. Extraparliamentary sanctions have to be forged if socialist transformation is to be realised not merely in law but in reality. The Patna meeting decided to make an appeal for socialist unity. Unfortunately there was no favourable response from our socialist friends. But after the Chinese invasion an attempt at the state level was made in Uttar Pradesh to start and expedite the process of merger. At one time it seemed that the merger was almost a certainty but once again it eluded us.

We met in Bhopal against this background last year. Our resolution demanding resignation of the Nehru Government was

interpreted by some as a counsel of despair. However, the developments during the last eleven months have proved the correctness of our assessment, and every day that passes, brings fresh evidence to support our line of thinking. The agitations and the satyagraha that have been conducted in various provinces on the basis of the ten-point programme adopted at Bhopal have kindled a new spirit in our workers and have created a new hope and confidence in the people. The fear expressed by some that it would help the growth of anti-national and anti-socialist forces has proved groundless. On the contrary, the consolidation of democratic forces has started and socialist unity which was considered almost impossible has been achieved. The people are now looking for an alternative focus of political and moral authority, a focus capable of growing in various dimensions and successfully challenging the authority of the Congress.

The purpose of the resolution adopted at Bhopal was not merely to demand resignation of the Nehru Government and keep quiet thereafter. Such a resolution, unless backed by effective sanctions, is utterly worthless. The Conference, therefore, gave a call to Party workers to prepare the country for a struggle and forge effective sanctions. The ten-point programme provides the basis for the contemplated socialist offensive to effect a breakthrough in the stagnant situation. At first the bold decision caused some surprise and bewilderment in some quarters. They felt that if we were really serious in our desire to challenge the authority of the Congress, a united front with all opposition forces was absolutely essential. But with a growing understanding of the context of the decision and of the realisation that the struggle is not just a law breaking activity but has a wider significance, the confusion is largely being cleared.

It was in an atmosphere of helplessness, frustration, and cynicism that the PSP came forward to give a bold lead. The National Executive was conscious of the stupendous nature of the task that the Party was called upon to undertake. It realised that resistance to evil and struggle for the good was the only means to counteract the process of moral decadence that had set in. It clearly stated the imperative need for rededication. But an all-India struggle straightaway was out of the question. The provincial branches were, therefore, asked to suggest issues on which they would like to launch a struggle. After careful consi-

deration of their reports, Gujarat, Bengal, U.P. and Maharashtra were given permission to launch struggles. In the meantime the leadership of the party went on educating the public about the nature of the socialist offensive and projecting the new image of the Party. They strove to put across to the Party workers and the public the PSP approach to the problems facing the country. Conferences were held in most of the states and the Party workers in fields and factories rallied round the banner. The Bhopal resolution, it appeared, touched a sympathetic chord in their hearts and they got the eagerly awaited line of action. Barring a few states, the Party cadres all over the country throbbed with a new life and vitality. Membership drive was undertaken vigorously and it is a matter of gratification and pride that this year we have twice as many members as last year. Obviously, PSP's new approach had started attracting the attention of the people. The unbearable burden of taxation coupled with the soaring prices of essential commodities had made the people restive. They were in search of an alternative focus of authority and now that focus was clearly emerging.

In an underdeveloped country like ours a successful war against poverty and social inequality is not possible without planning and socialism. Inevitably state power and the public sector acquire a commanding position in the economic life of the nation. However, planning and power are not enough to ensure rapid economic development and social progress. Without the cooperation of the working people economic plans, howsoever ambitious, will not produce the desired results. In the present state of our country the human factor is of major importance. Physical resources are, of course, important, but unless the human beings are enthused and inspired to make the maximum use of those resources rapid development is not possible. How do we inspire the people to exert to their utmost? How do we invest the natural human urges with social objectives? In such circumstances leaders with unquestioned moral authority alone can do the miracle.

The congress during the last seventeen years has increasingly ignored this aspect of the question. On the contrary, it has given greater and greater importance to positions of power, and in the process projected false values of life, with the result that people have begun to respect a person in authority more than

a person who does valuable work among the people, work that demands hard life, causes considerable suffering and provides no limelight. Consequently power has become a predominant motive and elections have acquired disproportionate importance, encouraging acquisitive tendencies among social and political workers. Idealism is at a discount, and corruption has become the rule. No wonder that the Congress is no longer wielding its former moral authority. This should not be interpreted to mean that the PSP does not recognise the importance of governmental authority, and has no will to power. If that were so, we had no business to function as a political party. Undoubtedly, the basic urge of all political parties is power. Moreover, in an underdeveloped country state power becomes all the more important. But it must be realised that without mass sanction political power by itself cannot bring about social transformation. On the contrary, the struggle for power without mass sanctions is likely to degenerate into self-aggrandisement and opportunism. Short-cuts to positions of power are then actively sought, corruption and nepotism become the norm and appeal to narrow loyalties of caste and community becomes the standard weapons. The PSP must never stoop to such low levels. We can never take to means that are evidently antagonistic to our objective. The resort to corruption or casteism in order to win a seat or to secure a post, is to abjure the very values of socialism. Now, in the post-freedom era, values may have undergone a change. They may have become more earthly. But that does not mean that the democratic socialist movement can ignore the sense of values. Of course, traditional values will be replaced by modernism. There will be scientific approach to the problems of life. But we socialists believe that all this is best expressed in the values of socialism and co-operative life. The Praja Socialist Party would stultify itself if, while striving for political power, it does not respect and actively work for these socialist values of life. Therefore, in quest of political power, the PSP would stick to these socialist values of life, no matter how long and arduous the journey.

Unfortunately, those PSP leaders, who with their modern scholarship and understanding could have helped develop such values, started forsaking the role of the opposition and veering towards the Congress. To their help came the much-advertised

and now the notorious Kamaraj Plan. This Plan was followed by the Jaipur essay in definition of socialism and soon after by the Bhuvaneshwar proclamation. The PSP knew that all this was just sound without substance. Our people continued to adhere to the Bhopal policy. The real test came when Shri Asoka Mehta accepted the Deputy Chairmanship of the Planning Commission. He justified his act by contending that the Bhopal decision was detrimental to the interests of the nation and harmful to the growth of democratic socialist forces. In his opinion the need of the hour was not opposition to the Congress but cooperation with it, and consolidation of socialist forces inside and outside the Congress. His decision, he said, was intended to precipitate rethinking in the PSP and in the country. Nevertheless the National Executive courageously resolved to implement the Bhopal decision and maintain discipline within its ranks.

Those who were inclined to go to the Congress and strengthen the forces of democratic socialism in that omnibus organisation have reached or are about to reach their destination. How far they would succeed in their aspiration to play an effective socialist role in the politics of the country is difficult to say. We are sceptical. Nevertheless we have no quarrel with them nor ill will towards them. Some of our valued colleagues had in the past gone to the Congress and we made no fuss about it. We had great regard and affection for them, and we continue to cherish that regard and affection. We have the same regard and affection for Shri Asoka Mehta. We continue to remember that he was a founder-member of the Party. We also remember the great services rendered by him to the organisation. For his learning and scholarship, for his grasp of political and economic theories, we have nothing but admiration. But the plain fact is that Shri Asoka Mehta's thesis and the path that he wants us to follow is not acceptable to an overwhelming majority of our members. Nor is it acceptable to other non-Congress socialists. However, since this thesis and its conclusions are obviously a matter of conscience for him and his friends, they have our good wishes.

At one time Shri Asoka Mehta was one of those who were eager to come out of the Congress. He, like his other colleagues in those days, thought that an opposition party was necessary for the success of parliamentary democracy. He was also certain

that only the Socialist Party could play this role. Again, it was Asoka, who, more than anybody else, was convinced that it was the Socialist Party that could defeat the Congress and become an alternative to the Congress Government. But the results of the 1952 elections were most disappointing, and Shri Asoka Mehta soon after came forward to propound his new thesis about the political compulsions in a backward economy. On the basis of an analysis of the election results he came to think that collaboration rather than opposition to the Congress was needed. He suddenly realised that on the issues of nationalism, secularism and democracy the PSP had more in common with the Congress than with other forces arrayed in opposition to the Government. He thought that rapid economic development demands higher taxation and "an opposition party, to build itself up, decries and resists the consequent strains". If a progressive party like the PSP does this the ruling party would become reluctant to embark on bold policies and therefore development would be stifled. In an underdeveloped country, according to Shri Mehta, "If totalitarianism is unwise, parliamentary democracy is not much helpful. Even if just two parties existed, the axiom that opposition's job is to oppose would make economic development difficult". Hence, Asoka Mehta would like a "broadbased government holding power on a long-term tenure, in effect though not in law", to function in India in the interest of economic development. In short, Shri Mehta came to the conclusion that the socialists who did not differ from the Congress on fundamental issues of nationalism, secularism, and democracy had no reason to remain out of the Congress and oppose it. Only those who were opposed to the fundamentals should be outside the Congress, and they should be driven to the fringes by the combined strength of the Socialists and Congressmen.

If we look at the developments during the last seventeen years, it will be seen that the Congress has enjoyed a long-term tenure of office with practically no opposition which could be termed as an alternative focus of power. There was no opposition worth the name to fight against their measures and policies. Besides, what little voice the Socialists had in the Parliament and outside was never raised against progressive measures. If Shri Mehta's thesis was correct the Congress Government would have moved forward in a big way. Unfortunately, the Congress did not

encourage any processes of social change. Shri Mehta could conceive of areas of agreement with the Congress, but they did not exist for the Congress leadership. In the emergency period when China invaded our country, we offered, under the leadership of Shri Mehta, all our cooperation and everyone of us knows what happened.

Shri Asoka Mehta's idea of a broad-based government is nothing new. In 1947, Mahatma Gandhi advised the Congress Working Committee to include in the first cabinet of the country, men like Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherji. Coupled with this he had urged the Congress leaders to give a socialist orientation to the Congress organisation by making Acharya Narendra Dev its President, even as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was chosen to preside over it at Lahore where complete independence was adopted as its goal. While the Working Committee agreed to include the abovementioned leaders in the Cabinet, they turned down the suggestion about the socialist orientation. On the contrary, immediately after Gandhiji's death, they amended the constitution of the Congress in such a way that the Socialists had no choice but to leave the parent organisation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who is considered to be a great socialist, did not move a finger to stop this expulsion of the radical elements from the Congress. The non-Congress leaders who were included in the Cabinet could not pull on for long, either. They left the Government one after another. Why did they leave? Was Dr. Ambedkar's Hindu Code Bill a reactionary measure? If not, why did the Prime Minister put it in the cold storage? What was it that compelled Shri C. D. Deshmukh to resign from the Cabinet? Was it because the Nehru Government wanted to be more radical and Shri C. D. Deshmukh was a conservative? The obvious fact is that Pandit Nehru has not shown the necessary broadmindedness or understanding when it came to sharing of power and confidence with his colleagues. And yet Nehru is perhaps the most enlightened and progressive of the Congress leaders. When others come in his place the chances of improvement for the better would be even more slender.

At this point it would be useful to analyse and understand the nature of the Indian National Congress as it functions today and has been functioning since the attainment of Independence. On 15th August 1947 the Congress was given the historic chance

to reshape the destinies of this ancient land. But it seems to me that the nature of this chance was misunderstood. The country had become free. But that did not mean that it was also fully democratic. During the national struggle we hardly ever made a distinction between the two, and, therefore, when we secured freedom we thought that we had also got democracy. What the 15th August of that glorious year, 1947, gave us was not democracy but a historic chance to build democracy. Now friends, you know democracy has different forms. Schooled as we are in the ideas of British democracy we adopted for the British type of democracy when the time came for adopting the Constitution of our Republic. We are a big sprawling country and we made certain adjustments to suit its size and character. But basically it was British system that we adopted.

Now, as you know, the form of democracy that obtains in the U.K. is founded on the two-party system. The late Acharya Jawadekar, one of the foremost political thinkers of modern times, pointed out very cogently that the success of parliamentary democracy is possible only when the two parties confronting each other as the ruling party and the opposition have an identity of outlook on fundamentals. Parliamentary democracy cannot thrive if the two parties are basically and fundamentally different in their thinking, outlook, means and methods. For instance, you cannot have one party which is secular and the other which is communal, and make a success of democracy. When we adopted the British form of democracy, we naturally pledged ourselves to make a success of it. In my humble opinion, Indian political parties, and most of all the Indian National Congress, have yet to redeem that pledge. The challenge that we have accepted was not to work out an existing system but to create conditions for the growth and success of the system envisaged in the Constitution. Those who have participated in the freedom movement can realise that we had to start from a scratch. It is true, under the British regime, we had democratic bodies like the Legislative Councils and the Central Assembly. However, as the government was irremovable, there was no room for two secular democratic parties. On one side there was the foreign government and on the other the opposition, a broad national front. After the withdrawal by the British, when the Congress came to power, there were no two parties sharing the fundamental

faith in secular democracy. It was only when the Socialists came out of the Congress that the basic conditions for the success of democracy was realised at least in theory. However, the difference in their respective strength was so great that in reality only one secular democratic party was ruling this vast country without an opposition. The historic challenge was therefore peculiar. It was to build a two-party system. Could it be said that the responsibility of building up an opposition party was that of the Socialists alone. Is it possible for the Congress, to escape its share of responsibility? You will thus see the unique nature of the challenge that history called upon the ruling Congress Party to accept.

Mahatma Gandhi had the capacity to realise the nature of the challenge. It will be remembered that at one stage he advised the Congress leadership to wind up the organisation and leave people free to form new parties according to their principles and programmes. This advice was not acceptable to the Congress leadership. They thought that the continued existence of the Congress with its traditions was essential to keep the country together and build it up. But just for that reason they could not absolve themselves of the responsibility of building up a lasting democratic system of government. Indeed, the responsibility became all the more heavy; and I make bold to say, that the Indian National Congress was capable of shouldering this twin responsibility and emerging as a body having no parallel elsewhere. The Indian situation demanded that kind of constructive genius from the Congress. After all, the Congress was not an ordinary political party. It had a unique record, a unique tradition, and a unique leadership. It swore by the ideals of a leader who belonged straight in the line of Buddha and Christ. Its leadership was nurtured in his values. They had grown under his guidance. Further, the Congress Party had leaders who, in their own right, were great and had unique qualities. There is Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In his enlightened outlook, culture and progressive yearnings he has had hardly an equal among the politicians of the world. There was Sardar Patel who combined in an abundant measure wisdom and resolution. And there was Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad who brought to bear on his actions the classic qualities of a savant. These people could have understood the unique challenge that History only

in her stride could present.

But what did they actually do? They did not even seem to appreciate its importance and magnitude. They seemed to have passed by it without even being aware of its existence. Let me state the challenge again. They were not called upon to build up only their own party. Their task was to create and maintain a climate congenial to the growth also of an opposition party capable of taking over in time to come. They should not have ignored the dictum that power corrupts, and inevitably one day or other some other party has to come in and replace the ruling party, if democracy is to survive. When the Socialists parted company with the Congress and decided to function as an independent party, a beginning of an alternative party was made. This was the only party that shared with the Congress the values of secularism and democracy. Its leaders were the erstwhile colleagues of Congress leaders, who had shared with them the joys and sufferings of a great fight for freedom. I am not suggesting that the Congress should have gone out of their way to build the Socialist Party as an alternative. Far from it. They could have treated the Socialist Party a little differently than they would treat anti-national and anti-social parties, and given it a legitimate chance. But that did not happen. Although the Congress leaders were men of great moral and intellectual dimensions they were, like others, victims of human frailties and did everything to thwart the growth of their opponents. If nothing else, the Socialist Party was entitled to, at least a reciprocal treatment. I will illustrate. We did not put up a candidate against the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and against the Prime Minister. We wanted to lay down sound conventions. But did they? No, they appeared to take a perverse delight in using their superior might of money, power, and organisation in defeating Acharya Narendra Deva, who was their colleague, friend, comrade and, let me say emphatically, their equal in knowledge, wisdom, scholarship, enlightened outlook, idealism and sacrifice. In every sense, he was their peer. The tricks and tactics used by the Congress leadership to break and disrupt our party, superbly described by Shri Asoka Mehta as "Political Piracy"; the vile propaganda against our Party, indulged in even by the highest, that we were receiving foreign money; the preference shown to the communists who were

the very anti-thesis of democracy and nationalism—all this shows that the Congress Party, far from being actuated by a consciousness of a unique historic duty, was motivated by the passions of an undeveloped, backward, power possessed, power-hungry party. Their hostility was not confined merely to the political field. They were eager to establish their monopoly in all spheres of social activity. Even an organisation like the Rashtra Seva Dal devoted to constructive work and the education of the young, became an eyesore to them. All sorts of restrictions were put on that organisation because of its affinities towards the Congress Socialist Party. In this they even forgot that they had a special duty towards constructive work which was so dear to Mahatma Gandhi by whose name they swear in season and out of season. Thousands of young men and women thrown up during the national movement, dedicated themselves to work for a new India. Those of them who were out of Congress received step motherly treatment and others were lured towards positions of power. In the field of trade unions and cooperatives the same tendency prevails. In this manner, the Congress had exhausted, wasted and in some cases destroyed these splendid spiritual and moral assets of the nation.

Now, why should a party, led by a great man like Nehru, indulge in such political piracy and dog-in-the manger policy? This I believe is the result of his peculiar conception of his own party. For years before independence he was leader of the national movement. The Congress was then a truly national movement. People of various persuasions and different orientations gathered under its umbrella with the sole desire of driving out the British. Even when independence came and the Congress became the ruling party with Nehru as Prime Minister, he continued to believe fondly that the Congress was a national movement as before. He and his lieutenants like Shri Krishna Menon went on proclaiming that the Congress was a national front. This was, of course, convenient from many points of view. It enabled the Congress leaders to identify the country with their party. It also enabled them to throw open the doors of the Congress to all sorts of elements in the country. But the most important thing is that this enabled them to try to destroy the opposition parties without a prick of conscience, since they could easily convince themselves that all those who opposed the

Congress were anti-national.

The pertinent question that arises here is whether a party in a parliamentary democracy could function as the ruling party and at the same time remain a national movement. Can the leader of the ruling party be at the same time the leader of the entire country, as Nehru evidently fancies and relishes the idea of being one? History, I believe, has already given the answer. The inexorable logic of the situation would not allow him to do so. It would demand a laxity of discipline and tolerance of contrary opinion which would disrupt the efficient functioning of the party and even of the government. As a Prime Minister the leader of the party would be compelled to demand a degree of conformity from his followers that would destroy the character and atmosphere of a national movement. This was dramatically illustrated when Nehru as Prime Minister refused to share power with Acharya Kripalani as the President of the Congress. The false belief that Congresss is a national movement has generated a conflict between its legislative and organisational wings, beyond all reasonable limits. It has allowed all sorts of heterogenous elements to enter into the Congress and then intrigue for positions of power with disastrous results both to the efficient working of the government and the moral tenor of the organisation. It has led to the cynical strategy on the part of large elements to accept policy declarations and then sabotage them in practice. It encourages disruptive elements both within the Congress and the opposition, particularly within opposition parties that share the fundamental secular democratic outlook with the ruling party. It poses a continual invitation to the disruptive elements in such opposition parties to defect and come over to the Congress. It has made political piracy a respectable form of political behaviour in this country. In short, it has prevented the emergence of healthy conventions regarding the relations between democratic parties and has, in general, encouraged lust for power and its attendant evils.

It should be easy to see why Asoka Mehta's thesis would prove sterile in a situation like this. It is not that the thesis has not been tried. As I said, several of our colleagues and members from other parties have in the past gone over to the Congress. The opposition has proved by and large ineffective. And yet the Congress has proved unable to deliver the goods. Why?

Because Asoka's thesis (which is only a variation of the belief that the Congress should be a national movement rather than a party), has inevitably brought in all those unhealthy tactics and stratagems that I have described above and that have vitiated the very functioning of the democratic party system. The solution is not to effect a ceremonial burial of this system, but to endeavour for the restoration of its healthy functioning, with all its decent practices and conventions. It is difficult to see how Asoka himself is going to succeed where even bigger stalwarts have failed especially in a period of the weakening of the authority of the leader, whose name till now worked as a magic.

Even Nehru, who stands over as a colossus amongst other Congress leaders, has failed to display a constructive genius. This is pointedly illustrated in his failure to build up a successor, either a person or a team. It is again illustrated in the failure to achieve in his economic policies a synthesis which would reflect the unity of democracy and socialism. His success in combining centralised planning with parliamentary democracy is only a mechanical device made possible by a steam roller majority in the legislature. The success is more apparent than real. His contention that the plan is a national plan because it is approved by the Parliament is not tenable. The Plan is not national in the real sense of the term even as the Congress today is not a national movement. Congress has a huge majority in the Parliament but the total votes cast for the Congress are less than fifty per cent. No wonder that the planners and the Congress government have not been able to enlist the willing cooperation of the people, much less their energetic participation. Unless a shift of power from the few to the many and a much larger measure of social and economic equality is realised, successful implementation of the plan will be impossible in the face of the prevailing inertia at the popular level. The success of democratic planning for socialism depends on the enthusiastic participation of the people in making and executing the plan through the institutions that are truly democratic and secular. The attempted democratic decentralisation is a step in the right direction. But in the demoralising atmosphere of political opportunism and corruption, a healthy growth of institutions like the cooperatives, trade unions and panchayats providing the basis for the new social order is very difficult. Secularism does not mean

absence of all values of life. An abiding faith in the values of democracy and socialism has to be created in the minds of the people and particularly the younger generation. Pandit Nehru, however, has failed to give to the nation and the people a faith to live for and if need be to die for.

For the last few months the Bhuwaneshwar resolution on democratic socialism is being advertised from the house tops. But is there anything new in that resolution? The resolution asserts that the public sector must progressively grow in large scale industry and trade, particularly in the field of heavy and basic industry as well as trade in essential commodities; economic development should not result in the widening of disparities of income and the concentration of wealth and means of production to the detriment of common people; limitation of incomes and property in private hands; the association of workers in the management of industry; adequate price to the farmer for his produce to enable him to make the needed investment. It also speaks stridently of the anti social forces in the form of unaccounted money, speculation, black marketing, and corruption; of the need of Congressmen being exemplary of the socialist philosophy in their everyday life; and of the necessity of changing the acquisitive structure of present day society and fostering ethical and spiritual values. All this is very good, of course. But one would be entitled to ask how these lofty ideals are going to be realised? The Bsuwaneshwar thesis has nothing to say on this point.

Is it possible to achieve these objectives with the present structure and composition of the Congress? Could that be a vehicle of rapid socialist transformation? So long as the desire to stick to power at all costs persists, the propertied classes will continue to grow powerful and retain their hegemony over the ruling party. Corruption will grow and the talk of ethical and spiritual values would sound absurd and meaningless.

It seems that the Congress leaders, in spite of their professions of socialism, want to shut their eyes to some of the basic facts of contemporary social life. It seems they want to forget the fact that the conflict of interests between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is daily getting intensified. Or else, the Congress President would not have said that they do not believe in class struggle. Do they at least accept the existence of class contradictions? If they do how do they propose to resolve them and

ensure justice to the exploited? The vested interests are well entrenched in the economic life of the country and are adequately organised to exercise pressure on the government at all levels. The exploited masses, on the other hand, are divided and dis-organised. Congressmen are showing increasing intolerance of organisations that refuse to fall in line with their party. They would even divide the working classes and crush them by all available means. They always speak of the working people, but are they doing anything to improve their lot, increase their miserable wages and lower the prices of the necessities of life? A bill to increase the emoluments of the members of Parliament could be rushed through in the names of rising costs of living and efficiency, but the wages of the government employees remain where they were.

Evidently the workers cannot hope to get a fair deal through the trade unions working under the hegemony of the Congress unless effectively pressurised by the trade unions free to pursue a militant policy to get their demands. Nor could the peasantry hope to get justice and equal opportunity in the field of production through the Congress. For a long time the socialists have been demanding and working for a parity between industrial and agricultural prices. Assuming that the parity is not feasible under the circumstances the agriculturist must get at least an equitable price for his produce. How could the peasant be expected to invest more and produce more if a remunerative price for his crop is not assured?

It is clear that, despite the political equality that we enjoy under the Constitution, prevailing social inequalities and lack of political consciousness, and communal and caste considerations deflect and occasionally distort the normal course of our political and economic development. The problem in such circumstances is not merely of collecting physical resources but of producing optimum results out of those resources. Every one knows that maximum results are not possible in the absence of scientific techniques, and efficient organisation, which presumes a scientific approach to various problems of life. Feudal outlook and attitudes have to be discarded in favour of modern and scientific way of thinking and acting. In a backward country, as I said earlier, state power acquires extraordinary importance and, therefore, a tendency to stick to power at all costs becomes

dominant. Once a party comes to power it can command enormous monetary and other resources and therefore, the election contests become highly uneven. Again, other factors like poverty and casteism become operative and make the contests even more uneven and unreal. The owning classes make money available to those parties which could be trusted to protest their hegemony over the economic life of the country. When they contribute to the Congress election funds in lakhs from the company funds it is more in the nature of an investment than charity. In several cases it is hush money to cover up their black deeds, shady transactions, and tax evasions. The root cause of corruption with its attendant evils could be traced to these deals and transactions. The disease and its toxins are spreading in the body politic from top to bottom. The corruption profits that should go for capital formation are being utilised to demoralise the voter and corrupt the political life of the country.

The people are shouting against corruption and nepotism, but their anger is shortived and not sustained. Indeed, the conscious section of the public knows that the ruling party is mainly responsible for this socio-political demoralisation. But they are also aware of the fact that in the peculiar circumstances the ruling party cannot be dislodged from power through the election alone. The rank and file of the PSP are now convinced that when the dice are so heavily loaded against them they cannot depend on elections alone to become a strong opposition, let alone winning a majority. The first and the foremost task before us today is to forge mass sanctions against the Congress misrule. A surging tide of an extra parliamentary democratic socialist movement wedded to secular nationalism, socialism, and democracy could alone release new forces for social change and provide an effective lever to dislodge the Congress from power. Only such a movement with its accent on mass activisation could create political assets and moral resources for building a new social order in which individuals and groups of people would be actuated to work more by a sense of social obligation than by the inherent tendency of acquisitiveness or possession for power.

The tremendous nature of this task makes it imperative for us to unite all the genuine forces of socialism in the country and weld them into a powerful weapon. At the same time the conclusion is inevitable that in the contemplated movement

and struggle we must steer clear of the anti-national and reactionary forces. Ours is not a negative objective of pulling down the Congress from power, but a positive one of providing a better alternative.

Friends, it is my conviction that if we are to do our duty to the country and the people of India, our place is not within the Congress. We must not spare efforts to build a rival focus of political and moral authority, to carry on our struggle against lethargy and stagnation, and to prosecute war on poverty and social inequality. If we stick to our principles and stand firmly by our faith there are good chances of success. At the same time we socialists must do some introspection and subject ourselves to self-criticism. Frankly speaking, the fact cannot be gainsaid that we, too, have not exerted ourselves to the best of our capacity in carrying out the task that we had set before us. We have failed to develop and train a new leadership to do the job in the given circumstances. During the last ten years or so we have neglected the ideological training of our cadres. The process of thinking has more or less stopped. Inevitably the parliamentary activity and the performance of our members in the legislatures has acquired disproportionate importance and emphasis. At one time we projected and popularised three symbols of our activity, the Spade, the Prison and the Vote. Of the three the spade is almost forgotten, the prison comes into the picture occasionally, and the vote has become the real pre-occupation. The socialist workers and also the leaders have ignored the fact that the vote becomes really effective when the constructive and combative activities symbolised by the spade and the prison have created adequate consciousness among the masses. That was a serious mistake on our part and the socialist movement has had to pay very heavily for it. Like the Congress we also started feeling that our main job was to fight elections and tended to become the imitators of the Congress in the matter of social values. Indeed, in the initial stages some constructive work could have been attempted with considerable success without obstructions from the ruling party. Today the situation is different. The ruling party has undergone a sea of change and even constructive work has become well-nigh impossible except under the aegis of the Congress. Fruitful constructive activity on an appreciable scale could be thought of only when effective mass

CHAPTER 2

RISE TO THE OCCASION

WE ARE meeting in this Foundation Conference of the Samyukta Socialist Party at a time when the democratic socialist movement in the country is passing through a period of transition. The forces that compelled this transformation are gathering momentum continuously and in the context of developing crisis an upsurge seems imminent. The common man is oppressed by a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. He does not know what kind of situation he will be called upon to face the next day and is getting more and more impatient with the Government of the day. Against this background the need for an effective opposition party is being strongly felt and therefore the people in general and the socialists in particular are watching with hope and anxiety the outcome of this conference. When the Praja Socialist Party and the Socialist Party decided to merge and formed the Samyukhta Socialist Party there was a feeling of satisfaction all over the country. It was hoped that out of this merger will emerge a strong party of Socialist opposition. During the last six months, however, we have not been able to show satisfactory progress and the goodwill and support that was forthcoming in the initial stages is rapidly waning. It is up to us, now in this conference, to make a supreme effort to regain that initial confidence and support by coming to wise decisions in respect of policy and programme.

Socialism became a part of our thinking during our struggle for national freedom. Socialist thought and ideology struck roots in the minds of the youthful section of the leadership in the national movement mainly as a scientific method of achieving our independence by a revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist government. The socialist image of an ideal society was no less attractive to the youth but it was the scientific method. Since that time several groups and parties professing socialist ideology came into existence, each inspired and propelled by the necessity

of removing certain unjust and galling features of the prevailing economic and social system of which they were the victims. Some of them are functioning independently even to this day. Those who led these groups and parties were mostly from the educated classes, and although they worked in the name of socialism the people who followed them did so out of their inherent urge for social justice and for the redress of their day to day grievances. Socialist thought and ideology was not adequately assimilated by them and their movements were fragmentary in point of time and place. It must be frankly admitted that after the attainment of freedom the socialists, though they came out of the Congress, did not penetrate into the lower layers of society to establish vital links with them by creating new leadership from among the masses themselves. It was fondly believed that by throwing open the doors of the socialist party to the masses those intimate links could be established. The selective membership was therefore given up for mass membership. The result was just the opposite. During the days of selective membership serious efforts used to be made for the education and training of cadres. But after the party became a mass party, the thinking and educating processes did not receive the same attention. Later on the election campaigns occupied the centre of the stage and the cadre-building activity was totally neglected. This failure to take the movement to the lowest layers of the society and to create new leadership cadres, stunted the growth of the socialist movement, making it superficial, anaemic and moribund. The Communist Party and the Jan Sangh on the contrary continued to work hard with a view to spreading their influence and succeeded in making considerable progress. Besides with the declaration of the Congress in favour of socialism the word has lost some of its impact and appeal to the toiling masses. It sounds hollow.

Consequently at the time of the general elections opposition votes are divided to the advantage of the Congress which continues to hang on to power by perpetuating provincial, religious, and caste loyalties. It is true that some provincial, religious and caste organisations have in them a progressive social content. If this progressive democratic content were to be emphasised and canalised in the right direction the sectarian shell of these organisations could be broken and the social forces thus released would join the main current of our democratic life. But the

Congress rather than emphasising the progressive content of these bodies has tended to preserve their sectarian loyalties and to harness them for the perpetuation of its power. They are themselves fomenting provincial-cum-linguistic rivalries and religious fanaticism, with the result that the very people who own their loyalty to the Congress are getting impatient with it. Besides, the progressive impoverishment of the common man is creating a mood of defiance in the country as a whole.

For the first time after Independence the masses are on the move on a nation-wide scale. The working people and the salaried middle class have started feeling their way to act in a collective manner and for a common objective. This mass impulse is very vaguely manifesting itself in the form of a suggestion to all opposition parties to unite against the ruling party. They are very eager to teach a lesson to the Congress, but little they realise that the defeat of the Congress by itself will not solve the problems that have made them desperate. When the combined opposition begins to tackle these problems, the divergent principles on which the various opposition parties are based will create a situation making it impossible for them to act collectively. The strength necessary to solve their problems could be developed not through election campaigns but through mass struggles. The awakening that comes during the course of the struggle and the impact of new ideas on the mass mind starts as process of evolution. Therefore in this period of crisis and transformation, our accent must be more on extraparliamentary activities amongst the people, particularly the backward sections of the society, than, on elections. Revolutionary energy released in the course of mass movements in a crisis creates the necessary sanctions for radical social changes and accelerates the process of evolution of a homogenous party of democratic socialism.

It was against this background that the decision to merge the two parties unconditionally was taken. A merger without prior agreement on major issues of policy and programme involved considerable risk. Nevertheless we decided to take the risk because we thought it was necessary under the circumstances for the realisation of our charished goal. We must now put our shoulder to the task with courage and determination. If we keep aside our personal likes and dislikes, and concentrate on the real issues involved in an objective manner it should not

be difficult for us to hammer out a workable policy and programme of action for our party. The policy and programme must be clear enough to show the exact direction in which we want to go and how it is different from that of the ruling party. Then we shall be in a position to make an effective appeal to other like-minded parties to combine with us and provide an alternative to the Congress.

The present universal discontent in the country is not a temporary phase. It is rooted in the inequitous system of our society. Despite their professions of secularism, democracy and socialism, the ruling party is not at all serious in bringing about a radical change in the social structure. They say they want to abolish poverty but in practice impoverishment of the people continues. Five Year Plans have increased production but the advantage goes mainly to a small-class. The rich are becoming richer. In an underdeveloped country austerity has to be practised in the interest of capital formation and increased production. But here the austerity is imposed on the poor while the new class of rich, whether in private or public sector, are living a life as if they are in affluent society. There is no maximum limit to their income and our planners are very anxious to provide them with all sorts of luxuries no matter the diversion of resources to that purpose.

The ruling party's criterion of success of the Five Year Plan is not the attainment of physical targets but the expenditure targets. No wonder therefore that the prices are reaching over-increasing heights. The production of essential commodities is not keeping pace with the increased demand from the consumers, and as regards foodgrains the situation is the worst. Not only the prices of these commodities have gone sky high but in some places they are not even available. The policy of the Congress Government in respect of foodgrains provides a telling example of its subservience to the vested interest at the cost of the poor consumer. It is true that we have shortage in our foodgrains requirements. But the shortage is so marginal that with an equitable policy of distribution the disaster that we are facing today could have been easily avoided. It is obvious for any student of economics that we have two alternatives before us. A policy of complete free trade depending on the buffer stocks made available to us by other countries or a full-fledged state

monopoly in foodgrains trade with remunerative price to the producer, a price that bears an equitable relationship with the prices of other goods.

All these days we have tried that first alternative and landed ourselves into the present ruinous situation. The profiteers are exploiting the opportunity afforded by the marginal shortage to make tons of money by robbing the consumer to the last paise. The second alternative is the only alternative for a self-respecting and a nonaligned country and particularly for one that aspires to build a socialist society. But it requires courage of conviction and a firm resolve to march ahead on the road to socialism. In doing so all those who come in the way have to be brushed aside unceremoniously. The Congress Party is incapable of mustering the necessary courage and save the common man from ruthless exploitation of the profiteer and the black-marketeer. Driven by this difficult economic plight the masses are gradually being forced to a point of desperation and the socialists cannot afford to play the role of silent spectators at this historic hour. They must act courageously, giving the people a correct lead and a sense of direction.

In regard to foreign relations, due to the vacillations of the ruling party we are in a somewhat helpless condition. In the place of active and vigorous nonalignment, we are going through a phase of subservience in action. The Indian people in the course of their national movement, always supported the freedom movements of the oppressed people, be they white, yellow or black. India was in the forefront of the anti-imperialist struggle of the colonial people the world over and when the Second World War broke out their attention was focused on us. We on our part intensified the struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and the British Government was compelled to transfer power to the Indian people. For some time after freedom was achieved we maintained our prestige as the friend of colonial peoples in their struggle against their imperialist masters. In the course of time, one after the other they also achieved their freedom and started playing their part in the post-war world which had been divided into two power blocks as a result of the emergence of the Soviet Union as a great power. It was in this context that we decided to keep aloof from these power blocks and devised nonalignment, meaning

thereby, a policy of free and independent action. In our active opposition to colonialism in every shape and form, we continued to believe in the ideas of universal peace and the imperative need for disarmament on a world scale. This policy attracted most of the Afro-Asian countries and India could make her contribution in preserving world peace.

However, an underdeveloped country like ours cannot continue to play an effective role as a nonaligned nation in world affairs, unless she developed inner strength by revolutionising her old social and economic systems. Mere shouting of slogans and high sounding phrases is not going to make us vigorous and powerful. The ruling party despite, its slogans of democracy and socialism has by its policies helped the concentration of economic power in a few hands. Social inequalities still persist and the outmoded social superstructure based on casteism remains more or less unchanged. The emotional integration of the people of the country which was in the process of being achieved during the struggle for freedom has now suffered a setback. On the contrary in its anxiety to retain power for itself the ruling party is accentuating the disintegrating tendencies. In the name of stability it is following a policy of conservatism, sheltering within itself corrupt reactionary interests when a revolutionary change is becoming urgent. Both economically and socially we are staggering behind and our international prestige has gone down very much. Small wonder that our nonalignment instead of being vigorous and active has become timid and halting. Our weakened stand on Tibetan and Hungarian issues cannot be otherwise explained. It was so on account of our subservience and helplessness. As a nation we have been humiliated and our territorial integrity has been violated.

The challenge posed by China on the one hand and Pakistan on the other cannot be met effectively unless we become strong and really united. Talk about national integration is meaningless until we start the demolition of the outmoded social order with its distinctions of high and low, and on its ruins begin to build a new society on the basis of social and economic equality. Such a revolutionary reconstruction alone could create a sense of belonging among the people at large. Only in this manner could be promoted the process of national integration. As it is, the working masses are being exploited as never before and the

confrontation of the exploited with their exploiters is inevitable and necessary. The situation cannot be altered by trying to reconcile the conflicting interests. The ruling party, paralysed by the divergent pulls within itself, is thoroughly incapable of giving a correct lead to the exploited masses. On the contrary they are weakening them by dividing their ranks and by helping a handful from amongst them to thrive. The various schemes and community projects are benefiting the haves in the rural areas. A strong party of democratic socialism, alone by intensifying the struggles of the down-trodden could save the situation, and therefore the people at large are expecting this foundation conference to forge a weapon capable of developing into an alternative focus of authority, political and moral.

A political line that this conference will evolve must be consistent with the principles and the basic aims of the Samyukta Socialist Party. It must also be capable of solving the problems posed by the concrete political and economic situation in which the country finds itself today. We must not do anything by which the elements and forces hostile to socialism and democracy would get the upper hand. The atmosphere of frustration, born out of the failure of the Congress is naturally being exploited by the reactionary and the anti-national forces. The ignorant and desperate people, who are not being taught to shed their sectarian loyalties, prejudices, and conservative notions, unwittingly go under the influence of the reactionary parties. Besides, in their daily struggles against exploitation and continuous impoverishment the working masses are compelled to take assistance and leadership from whichever quarter it comes. The people, in their ignorance and under pressure of circumstances begin to imagine why the various political parties despite their differences should not come together and help the solution of their problems. This notion of the people, howsoever unscientific, cannot be easily ignored. The Socialist Party therefore, in order to mobilise the masses for a popular struggle and to win their loyalty to socialism would be well advised to chalk out a policy that will give due weight to popular feelings and expectations. It would be unwise to assume a purist pose and a touch-me-not attitude in respect of struggles for specific issues which demand an immediate solution. Such struggles would afford ample opportunity of mass contact which could be well utilised for ideological training and for the incul-

cation of socialist values of life. It is through such persistent efforts to educate the people that one could hope to persuade them to cast off their superstitions and prejudices.

If a revolutionary reconstruction of our society is to be achieved by democratic means the people will have to change their outlook and, for that education must become a permanent feature of our policy and programme. It will have to be pursued as a continuing process even in the absence of a mass movement. It was not without reason that immediately after leaving the Congress the Socialist Party accepted the spade, the prison and the vote, as the triple symbol of its activities. The socialist parties who owe their inspiration to the national movement realised the value and importance of constructive programme more than anyone else. It is true that we have not paid adequate attention to the spade, the symbol of the constructive activity. Unfortunately the vote and the prison monopolised the attention and energy of our workers. This imbalance has considerably weakened our movement. It is a fact that the ruling party has tried to discourage and thwart such efforts on our part. But in spite of that we should have persisted in our efforts even by offering peaceful resistance to those who came in the way. As a means to instil in the mind of the people the socialist values of life constructive work is very effective and important. Education of the broad masses would strengthen the ethical impulse of the movement even as the struggle would inject vigour and dynamism in it. Even the elections must be treated as a part of the wide mass movement for organising the peoples' will to fight the vested interests and to bring about a radical change in the structure of our society.

In the course of the mass movement our workers must try their best to initiate the people into constructive activities. The Parliament has now decided to make Hindi as the official language of the Indian union. That creates a difficult situation which needs our urgent attention. Admittedly, English cannot take the place of an Indian language as the official language. It cannot be an effective medium for expressing the feeling and aspirations of the people either. It could hardly be taken as a universal medium of communication. During the struggle for freedom Hindi was looked upon and learnt as the possible link language for the entire country. Study of Hindi in prisons and

outside was common and it became one of the items in our constructive programme. It provided a cementing factor in our national movement. Nevertheless after the achievement of freedom and the formation of linguistic states the problem has changed considerably. In the non-Hindi States, particularly in the South, resistance to Hindi as the only official language has developed. Why should Hindi alone be selected out of fourteen languages recognised under the Constitution? Insistence from the Hindi-speaking States to make Hindi the official language here and now is also creating a feeling of anger in the Southern States. Some of them in their anger call it Hindi imperialism of the Aryans. These objections and angry expressions cannot be ignored as of no consequence. It would be apparent for an objective mind that there is some grain of truth in their position. In Germany, Prussia dominated through the language. In India with a language very different from the four Dravidian languages and spoken by a section of the population only, the fear of South Indian people is not groundless. Imperialism is not merely an attitude of the mind. It is something more than that. It is a process by which one culture is subordinated to the other and in the end may even be eliminated. Our South Indian brothers are afraid of this calamity. If India is one irrespective of the various languages, it is because we have worshipped unity in diversity. The emotional integration has to be achieved not by destroying the diversified nature of our culture but by preserving it. With the present mood of Hindi enthusiasts this becomes all the more important. Human life is not a one-way street. The Hindiwallahs want to make it so. If Hindi is imposed on the unwilling minds they may succeed in making it a one-way street but there will be no real communion of the people. Diversity of our culture will be sacrificed in the interest of uniformity. The non-Hindi people will learn Hindi and even appreciate the Hindi mind and culture under the circumstances, but the Hindi people proud of their language on the strength of their number, will never be able to understand and appreciate the mind and the culture of the South. The only way to save the situation fraught with danger is to restore to the fourteen recognised languages an equal status. From this point of view every educated Indian must learn to feel proud of all the fourteen languages and must make it a point to study at least one language

other than his own. This idea was conceived by the late Acharya Narendra Dev but we who swear by his name have failed to implement it in practice. These days we hear of three-languages formula but that is another hoax. The third language these people would like to choose is Sanskrit. That is not to solve the problem. The third language should preferably be one of the four languages of Dravidian origin, and not language of Sanskrit origin. If a majority of our workers were to heed the advice of Acharya Narendra Dev seriously the language problem would not have been as serious and difficult as it is today. But it is never too late to mend. Let us pledge ourselves to implement his suggestions wholeheartedly and start from now. This should become an important item in our constructive programme. This programme should be implemented on a voluntary basis and could go on without any assistance from the Government. The Socialist Party should pledge itself that it would work for making the teaching of one of the South Indian languages compulsory in schools in the States whose official language is of Sanskrit origin.

I need not dilate on the other items of constructive programme like the cooperatives, youth organisation, trade unions, etc. but I should like to mention significantly the work in Panchayati Raj Institutions and other local bodies. In these institutions the socialists could see to it, at least try their best, that the representatives of the backward sections of the community get an effective voice and are in a position to defend their rights. Through these bodies they will be able to serve the people in respect of their day to day needs and difficulties. They would be in a position to fight the equal treatment promised to them under the constitution but deprived in practice.

The socialists who are keen to see that the substance of power is enjoyed by the backward sections who form the bulk of our population would be well advised to make special efforts to implement their programme in the sphere of local self government. If this item of our programme is seriously attempted with devotion and zeal, it will galvanise the society from the bottom. It will create a new ferment at the very grass-roots of democracy and release revolutionary energies essential to bring about a radical change. Indeed the socialists who earnestly shoulder this responsibility will be required to face stiff resistance from the

high caste and well-to-do sections of the community. Indeed it will be a school where our workers would be put on their honour and would be trained and tested in their efficiency and integrity.

It might be argued that there is too much power politics in these bodies and the socialists would do well to keep away from these. They may not be able to withstand the opposition from the vested interests and are more likely to succumb to the temptations held out for them. The argument has some grain of truth and cannot be brushed aside casually. But one must not run from the post of duty either. If dedication is real, ultimate success will come to those who are not deterred by failures.

With a section of the population it has become a fashion to deny the Panchayati Raj institutions as infected with goondaism and opportunism but those who have eyes to see and are not prejudiced, will find that there is no less goondaism and opportunism at the top. We have to play our part in spite of these dangers and difficulties. The democratic institutions at the bottom, properly and effectively activated would go a long way to impart vitality and strength to the democratic socialist movement. Such a ferment would throw up bands of young men and women as the crusaders for social justice and clean life. A new leadership would come up, a leadership capable of deploying these forces both in combative and constructive fields. Their revolutionary zeal could be utilised to revolutionise our agriculture by persuading the peasant to give up his outmoded traditional methods and implements and take to new and scientific methods.

Our election policy in respect of these institutions should be more flexible than that in the case of legislatures. The work in these bodies is mostly of administrative nature and the representatives of the people are required to make decisions of policy only on rare occasions. While it is true that a political party in an underdeveloped country can wield considerable authority by means of effective extraparliamentary activities and by rousing public opinion, the fact cannot be denied that the Parliament and the state Legislatures have acquired a pivotal position in Independent India. As a consequence, attitude towards life, and particularly towards political life, has changed. Legislatures being the main and the most important forum in the country, political parties take special interest in electioneering with a view to increasing their representation in the legislatures which in effect are the

seats of power. However, in a country with half a dozen parties in the opposition and the ruling party enjoying a virtual monopoly of power for over seventeen years it is very difficult to win elections. Blind adherence to principles without any thought of results is not necessarily a wise policy in all circumstances. Electioneering is more of an art than a science. Congress is ruling the country for the last seventeen years on the strength of less than 50% votes. All the opposition parties, however, cannot secure even 30% seats in the Parliament although they command more than 50% support from the voters. If this anomalous situation is to be rectified the opposition parties have to devise and follow a policy with a view to minimising the division of their votes. This should be possible without compromising the principles and identity of those parties. The Samyukta Socialist Party should set up candidates in selected constituencies where they have a sizable support and efficient organisation and invite others to follow a similar line of policy. Performance of each party in the last general elections could roughly be taken as the basis for deciding the measure of strength that each party could command in a particular constituency.

For the like minded parties there is no valid reason to maintain their separate existence any more in the face of the deteriorating situation. In the interest of democracy and the suffering masses, it becomes imperative that they merge themselves into a single party and achieve optimum results. It was to meet this situation that the merger of the Socialist Party and the Praja Socialist Party was brought about and that too unconditionally. We felt certain that it would be possible for us to work out during the interim period a line of action by broad agreement without challenging each others bonafides. But unfortunately controversies have arisen and even good faith is being questioned. This has given a setback to our movement. If people were to hold similar views in respect of every issue democracy would be very easy. Indeed there would be no need for it. But it is because people hold different views, many times opposite to each other, that the democratic way of life has been evolved. It is assumed that everyone is serious and on either side opinions are being held sincerely. It is not enough therefore to agree on fundamental principles of socialism; it is the practice of socialism that requires and tests our democratic faith. If all those who hold

different views in regard to policy and programme are to be branded as enemies of socialism and as agents of the opposite party there is no basis for our working together.

What has happened in the last six months has pained me very much. Motives have been attributed to persons for holding certain views. Although I am your Chairman I have to confess that I could not take any disciplinary action against any member because there was no constitution or rules of the party. In other words I had to admit that I was bereft of any authority. I kept mum in the face of an ugly situation because according to me that was a lesser evil from the point of view of unity. I hope and trust that comrades will realise the damage done to the Party and pledge themselves to abjure such methods; give up taking superior attitudes; and learn to forget and forgive. If we are incapable of having that broadmindedness, I do not know how it would be possible for us to become an alternative and a better alternative to the Congress.

I have tried to express my ideas on issues of policy which we have to decide in this conference. But in the end I would like to emphasise that whatever policy we may adopt, we shall not be able to make any headway unless we build up a disciplined and well-knit party organisation. During the last few years our workers have been functioning in various fields of activity, such as legislatures, local bodies, trade unions, cooperatives, youth organisations, etc. But we have hardly done anything to co-ordinate their activities or to give them training and education. Consequently, we have failed to make any appreciable impact on the mass mind. I hope that this aspect of our movement will also engage your attention during the course of deliberations. I may once again mention in the end that the people in general and socialist workers in particular, are awaiting with anxiety the results of our deliberations. I feel that this is the last chance for the socialist movement in our country and if we fail to take the opportunity by the forelock, history will not forgive us. Let us, therefore, keep aside our prejudices, personal likes and dislikes, and rededicate ourselves to the cause of democracy and socialism. History has thrown a great challenge to us. Let every one of us rise to the occasion and prove equal to the task.

CHAPTER 3

ON THE MOVE

WE ARE meeting here 14 months after the historic conference at Varanasi. Much water has flown down the Ganges since then. When the Socialist Party and the Praja Socialist Party merged together and founded the Samyukta Socialist Party, politically conscious people and the masses welcomed that development. They entertained high hopes from the newly formed organisation expecting that the merger of these two parties would start a process of consolidation bringing in its fold all sections and elements wedded to democratic socialism and secular nationalism. Unfortunately the process started by the merger was stifled to some extent when some of our former P.S.P. colleagues chose to break away from the Varanasi Conference. Their hasty decision to revive the P.S.P. was multi-motivated. It seems that some of them were impelled to take the impolitic decision at that crucial stage because they were more or less certain that the new party would adopt the electoral strategy of adjustment with all the opposition parties. Some others, especially the younger section were provoked and hustled out of the Conference by the untoward incidents that took place just before and in the course of the procession. Further they were persuaded to believe that the forces at the back of those untoward incidents would grow in course of time and become dominant in the new party. Whatever that may be certain section of devoted socialist workers left us to revive the P.S.P. There is no denying the fact that the socialist movement was weakened by their leaving the parent organisation. They would have acted otherwise if only they were to pause and ponder over the implications of their rash and hasty decision and the resulting damage to the cause of democracy and socialism.

The Bhopal resolution of the P.S.P. challenging the authority of the Congress and demanding late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's resignation as Prime Minister was adopted not in a huff. That resolution was the result of hard and collective thinking on the

part of the leadership. It was realised that the challenge posed by China was more ideological than militarist and that it could not be met effectively without a radical transformation of our social order. Assistance from friendly countries by itself cannot take us very far unless we revitalise, organise and lead the forces for social change in the desired direction. The Congress party with its present character and composition was incapable to undertake this historic task. Congress Government having forfeited their moral authority to rule, were incompetent to put their shoulder to the wheel with courage and determination. Their politics is no longer the manifestation of the struggles of the masses against the existing unjust social and economic conditions. The gulf between the rulers and the broad masses is rapidly widening and the ruling party to-day represents by and large the forces of status quo in the country. Moreover, their anxiety to remain in power at any cost makes them helpless tools in the hands of the exploiting classes. While shouting from house-tops that corruption should be rooted out they themselves provide the black-marketeers and profiteers tools of corruption in the form of unaccounted money and in the framework of controls they themselves function as their agents on several occasions. Rather than helping the struggle of the down-trodden masses for social and economic justice they put them down with a heavy hand. Those of the opposition who come forward to champion the cause of justice are suppressed in one way or another. In this context, without any prospect of improvement in the situation the socialists were driven to the conclusion that the authority of the Congress must be challenged and their Governments displaced from power, if freedom was to last and democracy to thrive.

Mere passing of brave resolutions, however, is no good if they are not followed by effective action. Resolutions without any will for implementation would rather deepen the growing mood of frustration in the public mind than helping to remove it. Democratic socialism is not merely an utopian dream of an egalitarian social order. It is a movement providing to the struggling masses the **modus operandi** to achieve their objective. It was against this background that the Bhopal Convention of the P.S.P. decided to prepare the country for a struggle. This was indeed a dynamic lead which if boldly implemented would

help the socialist movement and the country to come out of the present bog.

This decision of the P. S. P. was historic in many respects. It created the necessary climate for the socialist movement to catch up with the old spirit of revolution and vigorous activity. It was intended to push the leadership out of the psychology of diffidence and vacillation in the face of new challenges. It was the manifestation of the mind of the majority of field workers in the socialist movement. Without an identification with the struggles of the toiling masses for justice and equality, political life for them was absolutely meaningless. As a result of this decision the old socialist party who had set its face against unity, also changed their attitude and agreed to an unconditional merger. The merger of the two parties was not conceived merely as a mechanical unification of the two wings. It was hoped that out of this merger would grow a vigorous movement capable to provide a better and effective alternative to the Congress. Possibly the leaders of the P. S. P. thought that revolutionary step that pushed us out of the rut would stop at the merger of the two parties. Hardly they realised that with it would start a process of rethinking as well. The process of re-thinking brought out the various implications of that historic decision and led to certain inevitable conclusions. If the resolution was really intended to meet the crisis that was overtaking the country a dynamic programme of struggle and action had to be worked out. It was evident that the people could be assisted in their struggles fruitfully only by maximum mobilisation of forces of social change. A Satyagraha movement is not meant just for the mental satisfaction of the participants. It must solve the problems if not fully at least partially. A token Satyagraha under the prevailing circumstances is certainly not going to be effective considering the present monopolistic mentality of the Congress. Maximum mobilization becomes a must even for a partial solution of the problems involved in the struggle. Therefore whether one likes it or not, the socialists, if they are serious about their professed anxiety for the poor and the down-trodden, cannot avoid seeking co-operation of all other parties and organisation in support of the struggles on specific issues. That way alone the country could be prepared for a struggle. When this imperative became clear to some of our former P. S. P. friends they were taken

aback. It was a departure, and in their words a deviation from the old line of 'no-truck' with others who were opposed to socialism and democracy. They were busy finding an easy way out of the Bhopal commitment. It was vehemently argued that the new line seeking co-operation of all parties on specific issues was insisted upon by the egocentric leaders of the old socialist party as if it was not inherent in the new policy adopted unanimously at Bhopal. It was clear enough that the authority of the Congress could be challenged only on the basis of dynamic programme of action. Secondly, if the struggle for which the country was to be prepared is to be effective one could not ignore the democratic instrument available in the form of legislatures. As such a new electoral strategy had to be evolved to break the Congress monopoly of power in the legislatures. They could be utilised as a lever to help extraparliamentary activities and movements. This could be done by agreeing to adjust Constituencies between various opposition parties on the basis of strength. The P. S. P. friends who left S. S. P. took a dogmatic stand on this issue also, and forced a split in the party. The split in the socialist ranks must have only gladdened the hearts of our opponents.

The S. S. P. not minding the split went ahead with its plan of consolidating the force of democratic socialism. The crisis was deepening and the masses remained without any means of redress within the framework of democratic mechanism. In a fresh bid to provide a workable solution a two-pronged policy resolution seeking electoral agreement to adjust constituencies amongst all opposition parties and maximum mobilisation of popular forces against injustice was adopted at Varanasi. The experience of the last 14 months has proved the correctness of this new policy. Immediately after the Conference the party had to go in with full strength in the mid-term elections in Kerala. The decision to adjust constituencies with other parties opposing the Congress was taken much before the Varanasi Conference and with the consent of a majority of the P. S. P. leaders. The Right Communists however refused to come in the electoral agreement for adjustment. Consequently, in several places there were triangular contests. These triangular contests helped the Congress to divide the opposition votes. The Right Communists, to that extent, cannot escape their share of the blame for what

happened later. Indeed by their tactics they helped the Congress to win a few more seats than it might have secured otherwise. The validity of the new policy of adjusting Constituencies amongst various non-Congress opposition parties was convincingly proved correct in the Kerala elections. Out of 132 seats the Congress could secure only 36. It is sometimes argued that mere adjutment of constituencies will not be enough and that a united front on the basis of minimum programme is essential to create confidence amongst voters for rejecting the Congress. In Kerala, However the voters did not complain on this score. They voted quite alright for the opposition although there was no united front and a minimum programme. In spite of having defeated the Congress the Kerala electorate was denied the right to have a Government of their choice by the monopolist junta of the Congress. The single biggest party in the legislature ought to have been given a chance to form a Government. It was their legitimate right. But the Congress leadership was not prepared to part with the power even for a few days. Regardless of democratic values they decided to continue their power by bringing in the President's Rule.

The Home minister Shri Gulzarilal Nanda on the eve of the election brought out a leaflet describing the activities of the Left Communists. There was nothing new in the leaflet. All the accusations of the Right Communists were given out for public consumption. This tactic was intened to serve two purposes. Mr. Nanda wanted the Kerala voters to believe in his accusations and reject the Left Communist candidates. They, however, refused to oblige him. The second object was to malign the S. S. P. as an anti-national force on the ground that it had adjustments with the Left Communists. This was a good enough stick to beat the S. S. P. and was made use of liberally for a pretty long time by our opponents. We had demanded then that those who were elected but detained in prison should be released. It was a right of the voters to get their representatives in the Legislature. On what ground could they be denied the services of their elected representatives? This demand on the part of S. S. P. was criticised as active assistance to the Left Communists who, it was alleged, were agents of a foreign power. Today all the opposition parties and quite a good section of the Congress are clamouring for lifting of the emergency. One

would like to ask in what respects the situation has changed since then to warrant this **volte face**? Pakistani episode was an interregnum and the Chinese threat continues even today. If it is not unpatriotic today to demand the withdrawal of the Defence of India Rules and the consequent release of detenues, how was it so when the S. S. P. demanded it in view of their success in the elections? The S. S. P. also suggested that if there were any charges against the detenues they should be prosecuted and put in prison. But it would be wrong to allow people to stand for election, permit them to vote in the elections, and then after they were returned, to disallow them to function as M.L.A.'s. It was unfair both to them and to the electorate.

Very soon after the Kerala Elections and the Congress imposed constitutional deadlock, the deteriorating food situation in the country put to the test the other part of our two-pronged new policy. Acute scarcity of food and conditions of starvation or near starvation prevailed in large areas of Bihar, Bengal, Maharashtra and Kerala. The S. S. P. could not be a silent spectator of this drift towards disaster. The suffering people had to be led in their struggle for justice. Action Committees were constituted in different states comprising of the representatives of various opposition parties. A call to observe a total Hartal which in these days is popularly known as BUNDH was given. The response from the public was beyond all expectations. In Bihar masses were on the move in a big way and the upsurge was so great that it reminded the people of the days of August, 1942. The State Government tried to suppress the movement by force. There was firing in several places killing innocent human beings and latti charges were frequently resorted to for taking vengeance on the people and their leaders. Jails were full. Even Dr. Lohia was put behind bars under the DIR. Just at that time Pakistan committed aggression in Kashmir. It produced an electric effect and the people quickly rallied round the National Flag to defend the honour and freedom of their motherland. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it was President Ayub Khan who saved the then Bihar Chief Minister whose position was extremely shaky. In other States like Maharashtra and Bengal the popular response was so great that the Government became nervous and made indiscriminate use of DIR to arrest most of the leaders. However, the people refused to be cowed

down. The P. S. P. and other interested parties persisted in their policy of splitting the popular forces. In Poona they organised separate processions on the same day and at the same time more or less. But the people ignored them and thus endorsed the stand of the S. S. P. I can say without fear of contradiction that the S. S. P. by its new policy touched the heart of the common man struggling for social justice. In the months of January and March we could witness similar mass upsurges in Kerala and Bengal respectively, because all parties came together to mobilise the people on the issue of food scarcity.

When Pakistan committed aggression in the Rann of Kutch last year Indo-Pak relationship became a live issue. The Sovereignty of our country was challenged and freedom endangered. In keeping with the new policy the S. S. P. tried to convene a conference of all the opposition parties with a view to hammer out a common approach to the problem created by the Pakistani aggression. But the conference did not materialise. The Jan Sangh refused to participate on the ground that the communists were invited. The Left Communists and the Swatantra Party holding very different views on the subject decided to keep aloof. The right communists were willing in the initial stages but after the agreement between the Late Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri and President Ayub Khan they became indifferent. It is well known that the Soviet Union had played its part in this agreement. Nevertheless the S.S.P. decided to organise a mammoth morcha in front of the Parliament to protest against the humiliating agreement and against the deteriorating food situation caused by the wrong and anti-socialist policy of the government in this regard. But long before the scheduled date of the morcha the large-scale Pakistani invasion in Kashmir was on. It was an undeclared war between the two countries and the tension was at the highest.

This war once again shed a flood of light on the basic cause at the root of Indo-Pak conflict. Our analysis of the situation is clear and simple. Pakistan was founded on the assumption that the Muslims in India are a separate nation. This assumption is unwarranted by facts and therefore totally wrong. In India crores of people belonging to different religions have lived together and must learn to live together as one family. They have to throw their lot together and must fight shoulder to shoulder to

eliminate poverty and inequality. That is the only road to progress and prosperity. The division of the country into Pakistan and Bharat is artificial. Blinded by communal hatred late Mr. Jinhā and his Muslim League insisted on it and the leaders of our national movement agreed to it in their eagerness to immediately acquire power. This division of the country on the basis of religion is going to be a permanent source of trouble and must be annulled as early as possible. At the same time it must be remembered that this objective cannot be achieved by means of military conquest. Those who preach that covertly or overtly are indulging in self-deception. If they are doing it deliberately and consciously their intention is to create hatred between the two communities. Such efforts are bound to weaken the nation and endanger our freedom. This does not mean that we should tolerate aggression. Undoubtedly if the rulers of Pakistan, and for that matter of any other neighbouring country, thrust a war on us as they did in September last India will fight it with all her might and be ready even for supreme sacrifice. In that case our fight will be with the bigotted leaders of Pakistan and not with the masses in Pakistan who are part and parcel of the same joint family of ours.

In the context of the international situation, a dispute between India and Pakistan, be it over Kashmir or any other issue, cannot be settled by war. The recent war between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir problem has confirmed the validity of our thesis on Indo-Pak relationship. These wars cannot be fought to a finish. Before a decisive stage is reached the big bosses of the world would intervene. Then follows a span of a patched up peace. White doves go up in the sky heralding the era of peace and progress for humanity. But this peace also is temporary even as the war between the two countries is halting. The problem of war and peace between India and Pakistan could be solved only when the basic cause is removed viz. when artificial partition is annulled and the joint family of Hindustan is brought under a common frontier in one shape or other.

Ours is a constructive approach as distinguished from the barren or the negative approach of others. Merely to shout for the destruction of Pakistan through war is not only stupid but mischievous. It is bound to give a fresh stimulus to the

feelings of estrangement between Hindus and Muslims, and impede the process of national integration on the basis of secularism, socialism and democracy. We are conscious that the projected idea of confederation is not easy to materialise. Nevertheless it is not going to do any harm. On the contrary it will help and accelerate the process of national integration. Slowly but surely muslims in India have started appreciating the healthy motive behind the idea and also its intrinsic value. Of late quite a number of muslim friends have started taking interest in the idea of confederation only because of the utility of that approach in the living present. They now look upon the S. S. P. as the party of secularism guaranteeing equal citizenship to all irrespective of their religion. It is gradually realised that the party is serious in its secular approach to life and means what it says. On several occasions the party workers have stood firm in the face of communal frenzy and fearless and without bothering for losing popularity and at times even risking their lives. During the recent disturbances in the Banaras Hindu University episode Dr. Lohia had to brave the stone-throwing of communalists at Varanasi. At Gorakhpur S. S. P. workers and Shri Raj Narayan jumped on the scene and faced boldly and courageously the forces of traditionalism and reaction. Bharat-Pak Unity conferences have been organised by our comrades at various places unmindful of the ridicule poured on them by some people on that account.

There are people even amongst the intellectuals who are inclined to pooh pooh this idea of a confederation as mere day-dreaming. I would like to stress that it is not so unreal as many people appear to think. On the contrary it is very relevant to the existing situation. It is vitally connected with the objective of building up an integrated new India strong enough to defend herself against any kind of aggression. Indeed the country must become so strong that no one dare attack our frontiers without risking their own existence. That becomes feasible only if people belonging to different religions, castes and communities are welded together into one national entity on the basis of equality. The basic cause of our weakness today is the lack of cohesion and the absence of social purpose in our people. The distinctions of high and low, rich and poor, coupled with the feelings of exclusiveness on account of religion makes the national fabric vulnerable.

Millions of our people do not feel any stake in the country and its freedom. They are devoid of any sense of belonging. It is true in times of national calamity they reacted healthily. But that was a short-lived mood. Very soon they slipped back again to their usual attitude of indifference.

The nature of the challenge posed by Pakistan and China does not seem to have been fully realised even by the people who consider themselves politically conscious. They have failed to appreciate the ideological significance of the challenge and the stupendous tasks and responsibilities that we have to undertake if we are determined to meet the challenge effectively. Modern war can hardly be fought successfully if the entire nation is not mobilised as one man behind the armed forces. The existing fissures in the national fabric caused by religious and caste distinctions coupled with the vast gulf separating the rich from the poor makes this task well nigh impossible. Nothing short of a revolutionary transformation of our society will suffice to accomplish the task. We must not forget that a great majority of our muslim brothers were converted to Islam from among the neglected and down-trodden castes and communities of Hindu society. Along with poverty and social inequality religion became one more factor to keep them away from the main current of our social and political life. They were persuaded to believe that the creation of a separate sovereign state on the basis of religion would be helpful to improve their lot. That this was an illusion and fraud on them is gradually becoming clear to them. This process has to be accelerated by helping them through their struggles against injustice. They have to wage a continuous war against poverty and social inequality to bring about a revolutionary transformation of our society. When this is achieved the broad masses in Pakistan also will see the futility of hatred towards India that is being inculcated in them. There will exist no tangible reason thereafter for continuing with the artificial partition except the motivation of power politics.

Ever party in the country today professes its anxiety to make the nation strong. How could they achieve that objective in the face of existing fissures in the social structure caused by distinctions of religion, caste, and class? That task could be attempted effectively only on the basis of secularism, democracy and socialism. This aspect of Indian revolution has been

emphasised by the S. S. P. as no other party has done. While believing in different faiths all must learn to live as equals in this world and work together for peace and progress. It is meaningless to talk about ending partition of India until the artificial man-made walls between Hindus and Muslims are not demolished.

The declared objective of the Congress is to build a democratic socialist order. They are enjoying a virtual monopoly of power for the last nineteen years. Could they say with honesty that they have utilised this power to implement this declared objective? Have they not by their partisan policy weakened the forces and stifled the process of national integration? Their record in the working class movement is also tarnished by their anti-labour policy. While the concentration of economic power is growing the working class movement is being divided, dismembered, and weakened by the Congress Government in the country. Nay, The Union Government, who is supposed to be the ideal employer, has taken pride in breaking the strikes of its employees for collective bargaining and in smashing their trade unions.

Labour Laws which should really help the workers are being utilised to boost up trade unions who have no representative character and recognition to deserving unions is denied under one excuse or another. If we really stand for democratic trade unionism, rival trade unions are bound to come up. The workers have a right to organise under the constitution. The only way to decide as to which union has the representative character is to have ballot at suitable intervals. The S. S. P. is fighting for this demand and must continue to do so in future in the interest of sound trade unionism and democratic socialism.

The struggle of the exploited against the exploiters in our country becomes complex due to the existence of caste system. This system has created barriers between sections of people and as a result discrimination is practised and justified for ages. A real socialist, true to his principle of equality, must hate these discriminating barriers, that separate man from man. Millions of our people even to this day are treated as backward and depressed. They are subjected to social tyranny and economic oppression for the simple reason that they were born in particular caste. They are compelled to live in hovels and slums in the most unhygienic conditions despite their performing socially useful

labour in fields and factories. From this point of view the problem of socialism in India is more social than economic. Democratic socialists in India have to perform a two-fold task. They have to demolish these traditional barriers of social discrimination and also fight against economic exploitation. This aspect was not adequately realised by the Indian socialists and they went on emphasising the economic aspect disproportionately. They committed the mistake of applying the principles of Marxism to Indian conditions in an artificial way. It is true that the exploited classes provide the motive power for a revolutionary change. But what do we mean by exploitation? Is it only the economic form of exploitation that supplies the motive power for social change? In India along with the economic forms of exploitation the traditional caste system with its distinctions of high and low, clean and unclean, creates the most inhuman and callous forms of social exploitation. A socialist movement that neglects these down-trodden masses for whom social change is an urgent need is bound to stultify itself. The S. S. P. therefore has to devote more and more attention to the needs and urges of the depressed and the down-trodden. The principle of special opportunities to the backward and the weaker sections of the community is intended to serve this purpose. The programme of socialism must be related to the needs of the people. Millions of men are today struggling for social justice but those who profess their faith in democratic socialism hardly take any note of them. The struggle of the slum dwellers for shelter is an instance in point. With the growth of industries in cities and townships the population of hutment dwellers is steadily growing. Our Planners have failed to appreciate the gravity of the problem. Various segments of our population are carrying on their struggles against social injustice in a fragmentary manner. They have to be brought in the mainstream of socialist movement. The socialists have to perform this task as early as possible. They must throw their lot with them and get themselves identified with their struggles. This special anxiety for the outcastes and hutment dwellers is likely to be misunderstood by the intellectuals and the white collared classes. They would sneer at and even ridicule us. But we must not get angry with them. It should be our duty to convince them of the correctness of our line. Our task is to bring all the people under a common roof of

equal citizenship without any discrimination or special privilege. Today this right of equal citizenship is conceded in theory but denied in practice. The ruling party has lost touch with the people. They no longer represent their urges and aspirations. They have almost withdrawn from the masses who by their struggle for freedom from bondage put them in power. They have failed to make provision even for their food and shelter. This would not have happened if they were to represent them in the real sense of the term. As a consequence discontent is mounting and people are becoming desperate, this resulting in occasional outbursts of protests and violent upsurges.

The country today is facing an economic and political crisis unprecedented in the post-independence period. We have completed three Five Year Plans and the national income, they say, has increased by 68%. Nevertheless we are still dependent for our food supplies on the generosity of foreign powers like the United States and others. According to the official figures there is a food shortage of over 8 per cent. It is a sad commentary on our planners that after 18 years of freedom they could not visualise this situation and take effective steps to make the country self-reliant. Apart from the shortage, the available supplies are not equitably distributed. The Government policy regarding food distribution is a continuous process of muddling through. Not that they were not forewarned. They were told by the economic experts that in a developing economy like ours, particularly when our population is growing very fast, there is bound to be severe shortage of consumer goods. Heavy expenditure on schemes that will need deficit financing for meeting the budget shortage is bound to shoot up the prices of essential commodities. The wholesale traders have taken advantage of the situation. They purchase from the peasant producer at the lowest price when he is in need of money and later on manipulate their stocks in such a manner that the prices go up tremendously. The rise in prices has no relation to the actual shortage of the foodgrains. In this manner both the agriculturist as well as the consumer is exploited to the maximum extent. The socialists from the very beginning have pressed for state trading in foodgrains. With an unremunerative price for the producer the agriculturist today has really no incentive to take to foodgrains production. It is futile to expect that the agriculturist would go in for foodgrain

production when other cash crops yield greater profits. Only those agriculturists who have no other alternative but to carry on with their agricultural occupation of dry farming have no alternative but produce foodgrains. The peasants having no means of subsistence are always subject to exploitation by the wholesale traders.

The wholesalers corner the stocks and raise prices according to their sweet will. Under these circumstances the only policy that could assure distributive justice is to procure foodgrains from the agriculturist at remunerative prices and distribute them to the consumers at reasonable prices which they can afford to pay. At intervals the ruling party declares itself in favour of state trading in foodgrains. But they have neither the will nor the determination to implement it. In the matter of food the whole country has to be treated as one unit. But today we see the curious spectacle of the Punjab peasants demonstrating in Delhi that their wheat is rotting for want of demand and at the same time people in the deficit states facing starvation. The Government refuses to do a reasonable thing on their own. They wait for the people to rise in revolt as they did in Bengal, Kerala, Bihar and Maharashtra. The socialists worth the name cannot keep themselves aloof from the mass upsurge for fear of violence breaking out on such occasions. Even the distribution of increased national income is unjust and unequal. There is nonoponistic concentration of wealth in a few hands while toiling masses continue to suffer from progressive impoverishment and want. During the last ten years while five per cent of the families at the top have increased their share in the national income from 14.5 to 24.7 the 20 per cent families at the bottom have got their share in the national income reduced from 7.46% to 6.6%. As a result of the rising prices of essential commodities the living standards of the producing masses are continuously being slashed down. There is no conscious and determined effort to control the prices. Additional burden of unproductive expenditure incurred for the defence of the country is passed on to the common man, while the rich continue to grow richer. In this manner austerity is being imposed on the common people and the top classes squander their illgotten wealth in pomp and luxury. A new class of rich is coming up in the country as a result of our planning which along with the ruling cliques enjoy

the fruits of freedom, leaving the majority of our people as victims of grinding poverty.

The rulers and the planners, however, are constantly worried about the comforts of the rich. The controversy over the people's car would serve as an example. If those who could spend thousands in purchasing a car are to be described as 'people' where shall we place those who cannot afford to buy a bicycle or even two meals a day? This is symbolic of the psychology of our rulers. It is no wonder that they turn a Nelson's eye to crying demands for food and shelter from the toiling millions. Surely they could have anticipated the shortage of housing accommodation in big cities and industrial townships. The prices of urban lands could have been freezed before they went up beyond the reach of the common man. The ever rising prices of land are chasing the poor people out of our cities which are becoming abodes of the rich. If our rulers are really serious about their professions of socialism they will have to change their approach in a fundamental way. Indeed austerity is necessary when the country is poor. Those who are amassing wealth must practice austerity in the interest of the country. Those who have the surplus purchasing power must be made to pay additional taxes. The additional purchasing power could be mopped up by direct taxation. Paradoxically it is this class of the rich that is vocal and persistent in its demand for relief in taxation, while the millions are like dumb driven cattle. The rich classes with their means of propaganda shout the loudest and smother the voice of the poor. If the country must incur additional expenditure for defence that burden must be shared equitably by all classes if there is any sense in our professing of socialism and democracy. Those who can afford must be taxed and not those who are on the point of breaking. If a few people have amassed wealth as a result of our economic planning is it too much to say that they should be made to part with a portion of their wealth for the sake of the country? Would it be unjust to demand that all who own property over five lakhs should be asked to pay a capital levy to meet the extraordinary demand on our exchequer? But this has become only a cry in the wilderness because those who are wielding the authority of the state have ceased to represent and understand the urges and the aspirations of the toiling masses. All that tall talk about the take-off point has vanished and the

country is facing a grave economic crisis. Apart from the grinding poverty of the masses, there is a real danger of slowing down the wheels of production. There is growing awareness on the part of the thinking people that if things are allowed to drift the alternative will be either revolution or subordination and decadence. It is gradually being realised that the stability which the Congress government was giving to the country is no longer a real stability but has degenerated into stagnation. Undoubtedly the economy is in doldrums and the people are at a loss to know what should be done to give it a push and new articulation. Under democracy it is the function of the opposition to displace the ruling party when it ceases to represent the wishes of the people and to carry out the mandate of the electorate. Unfortunately the people get perplexed when they find no effective opposition in the field. In the absence of a strong opposition all these years even the thinking people went on supporting the Congress because they thought it gave them at least stability. But now they are realising that this stability is not real but illusory. They however, are not able to find a way out of the impasse. They are therefore very eager to see an effective opposition coming up, an opposition that could at least pressurise the ruling party with a view to keeping on the right track. But an opposition party does not descend from the skies. Nor can the ruling party be whisked away out of existence. The opposition party has to grow from the soil by drawing its sustenance from the people. Most of the countries which achieved freedom from colonialism after the Second World War are faced with more or less the same problem. Power came to those organisations who battled with the imperialists. By the very nature of the struggle they had to wage most of them they were just unifying forces. After the attainment of freedom they adopted democratic constitutions. For the effective functioning of such constitutions, particularly of the parliamentary variety, existence of at least two parties is essential. But since during the struggle for freedom there were no two parties of comparable strength after freedom it became one party rule. In some countries they openly opted out for what is called the single party democracy prohibiting the formation of other parties. But in India there is freedom to organise an opposition to the ruling party. In practice however, Congress has continued to enjoy a monopoly of power all these eighteen

years. General elections are held every five years. The voters have an opportunity to exercise control over the ruling party and even to reject them. Unfortunately the degree of political consciousness in our country is still very low. An effective democratic opposition that could provide an alternative to the ruling party is still to come up. There are opposition parties and all of them together poll more votes than the ruling party. Rather than function as a check on the ruling party they fritter away their strength in fighting amongst themselves and thus help the ruling party to enjoy the monopoly of power. With the single member constituencies and the absence of proportional representation the ruling party comes out successful even on the basis of a minority of votes. The opposition parties divide the opposition votes. It is high time that all those who realise the need of an effective opposition in the interest of democracy and the country, ponder over this anomalous situation and find a way out. The Samyukta Socialist Party was the first to make the bold suggestion of an electoral agreement to adjust constituencies amongst various opposition parties generally on the basis of their performance in the last elections. The intention is to achieve by convention what is not available under the electoral law. It would help to secure an adequate representation of public opinion in the legislatures that are the sources of power and authority. It is true that in the past electoral alliances and united fronts were tried but with little success. The idea of united fronts is however not the same as an electoral agreement for the adjustment of constituencies. It is qualitatively different. While the united fronts are generally based on a minimum programme and common approach to the various problems facing the country the adjustment of constituencies is mainly intended to minimise the division of opposition votes. There cannot be a united front of parties whose fundamental approach to the basic problems is different from each other. In the case of electoral adjustment, however, the question of fundamentals is not raised at all. The main aim of the latter is to secure an adequate reflection of public opinion in legislatures and to help the process of developing gradually an effective opposition by eliminating the horde of independents and the parties who have hardly any purpose to serve or a trend of thought to represent.

Let it be remembered by the revolutionary socialists that this policy of adjustment is only of a secondary importance and is intended to serve a limited objective. There are no short cuts to revolution. The immediate aim is to end the stalemate and provide for the masses the democratic means of redress. The S. S. P. is accused of blind hatred towards the Congress. If it were so the S. S. P. would have readily agreed for a united front on the basis of a minimum programme. We have firmly rejected that idea even at the risk of losing some friendly parties. The object, it is true, is to dislodge the Congress from power or at least loosen its paralysing grip. The purpose is to restart the functioning of democratic mechanism which has almost come to a standstill on account of the Congress misrule. Once the monopoly of power is broken cleaner politics would receive the much needed stimulus... It would trigger afresh a process of polarisation resulting in a realignment of political forces in the country on the basis of ideology and ultimate objective.

During the freedom movement political activity to many of us was an end in itself. This was so because those who participated in the movement experienced an identification with the urges of the struggling masses for justice. We continued to be inspired by the same motives even after independence was achieved. Very soon it was realised that this could not be done effectively by remaining in the Congress. The socialists therefore came out of the parent organisation to start their journey anew. Honest politics seeks and finds fulfilment in standing by the side of the masses in their struggle for social justice and national integration. In the peculiar environment of India justice could be assured to the toiling masses only under a new social order based on a secularism, socialism and democracy. The nation cannot be strengthened unless a revolutionary transformation is effected on the basis of these principles. With this end in view the socialists started on their revolutionary path. The journey is long and tedious. Without a sturdy faith in the ultimate objective it will not be possible to remain steadfast on the chosen path. It is a matter of painful disappointment that some of our leaders were found wanting in that faith to work for the great ideal in the face of reverses and disappointments. They left their followers in the midst of the journey. Nevertheless it is gratifying to note that the rank and file continued to go ahead

in a mood of devotion and unending endeavour.

In the new environment after the attainment of freedom common man's attitude to politics and politicians has changed considerably. The Congress misrule has done its utmost to repulse the younger generation from political activity. It is the youth that provides the dynamic elements to our social life and helps keep the wheels of change moving on continually according to the needs of the people. In the vitiated atmosphere of the present, honest politicians find it difficult to function effectively. The problem before them is how to become effective and yet not swerve away from the chosen path. By creating a defensive ring round us it is possible to maintain the purity of our motivation. That might give mental satisfaction as well. But it is doubtful whether it would offer any solution to the problems. Socialist ideology and the socialist movement become meaningful only when it provides a **modus operandi** for solving the problems of the age. Besides, it has to give satisfaction to the yearnings of the soul for truth and justice. No thinking person would be attracted to the socialist movement if he is not assured that his activity will give him the joy of identifying himself with the underlying tensions and struggles of the masses. He must also be convinced that by so doing he is strengthening the country and its freedom. Further he will not continue in the movement if there is no suitable policy and a practical programme for the resolution of these tensions and for the effective prosecution of the struggles. Utopian dreams borrowed from others who function in a different environment are no good. An effort to graft on our body politic something which cannot draw substance from the society is bound to fail. The socialist movement will not get the nourishment to grow unless more and more people are involved in that movement. Increasing involvement of the masses in the struggle is possible only if we tackle their problems and help them realise their aspirations as human beings. Urge to grow and thrive as equal citizens in the country is basic in our life. The socialists cannot afford to ignore this fundamental healthy motivation of the mass mind. The challenges posed both by China and Pakistan cannot be successfully met unless these fundamental urges of our masses are satisfied. It is with this end in view that we have decided to seek the cooperation from all the parties and organisations with a view to secure a maximum mobilisation of the popular

CHAPTER 4

LESSONS OF NAXALBARI

THE AGITATION that is going on presently in Naxalbari poses a problem that is peculiar in several respects. There is a coalition ministry in office and the Left Communist Party officially known as CPI (M) is the dominant partner of the coalition. In the years after Independence there have been many direct action movements by the opposition parties against the Government of the majority party for the redress of certain grievances and for the fulfilment of certain specific demands. But there was hardly any Satyagraha or a direct action struggle launched by the adherents of the ruling party itself against its own government. Even such a movement in a country like ours where the governments are slow to move could be justified provided it is conducted peacefully. But an agitation and a direct action movement with weapons like spears, bows, arrows and even guns cannot be tolerated under a democratic government. It becomes all the more objectionable when the government is in the hands of those who sponsor the movement. It is the negation of democracy and the denial of the rule of law. If the existing law is outmoded and detrimental to the interest of the broad masses, by all means amend it in favour of the masses. There is no justification under the circumstances for a violent movement like the one Naxalbari at present.

It is said that the basic motivation of the Naxalbari campaign is the redressal of genuine agrarian grievances of the poor and the landless peasants who have been driven to desperation by the exploitation of big landlords. To say the least, this is only partially true. It is certainly not the whole truth. The contention that the Adivasis were forcibly evicted from land and, therefore, they started the resistance movement is also not correct. The official records show that no representations were made to the authorities regarding forcible or illegal evictions of share croppers on behalf of any individuals, political parties or Kisan organisation during the last two years or so. It should be remembered that

the Kisan movement in this area is of long standing and its leadership is in the hands of the Communists. It is, therefore, not possible to believe that they failed to take up cases of illegal eviction. It is true that since the Estate Acquisition Act came into force about 160 complaints were registered by the landlords alleging illegal occupation of land. Out of a total of 160 such complaints 97 were disposed off and only in 11 cases eviction orders were passed. It is obvious from this that the deciding authorities have no bias against the poor or landless peasants. However, when the State Acquisition Act was enforced this area has had its share of Benami transfers and shady deals by the land owners to avoid the provisions of law and it seems to be the main complaint in the present agitation and agrarian trouble. With a view to giving relief to the poor peasants and the landless the present government have constituted committees consisting of representatives of various parties and the Kisan organisations. But the Left Communists have refused to cooperate with these committees. This attitude on the part of the Communists is really very intriguing.

The present agitation cannot be described as a struggle essentially and exclusively between the jotedars and the landless peasantry. An attempt to do so would be an essay in over simplification. Undoubtedly there is land hunger amongst landless as it is in the rest of our rural India. With no other means of subsistence a large number of landless persons in rural areas are anxious to get a piece of land for cultivation. In this case of Naxalbari there is a mingling of economic, ethnic and social factors. Besides the disparity between jotedars and the landless in the Naxalbari area is not so acute as is being made out. It is worthwhile to note the realities of the situation in this respect.

The entire population of the Siliguri sub-division excluding municipal area is 1,50,346. The Tarai Khas Mahal of the sub-division has about 60 thousand acres of cultivable land. These lands were held by 6104 under tenants who were under 860 jotedars, before the State Acquisition Act was passed. Barring a few Muslims, most of the jotedars are high class Bihari and Bengali persons and a majority of their tenants are from Rajbansis who are scheduled caste and original residents of this area. Later on the composition of the population underwent a considerable change by infusion

of tea garden labourers who belong to the Adivasi tribes. Subsequently transfer of some area of Bihar to West Bengal as a result of reorganisation of States changed the pattern still further. The ceiling fixed by the State Acquisition Act was 25 acres and when the Act was brought into force, out of the 60 thousand acres 17 thousand acres became vested in the government. One thousand acres out of this were reserved for personnel and six thousand found unsuitable for cultivation. Out of the remaining ten thousand, 7500 have been redistributed mostly among the landless cultivators. There is very little surplus land now left with the twelve tea gardens in the area. The surplus forest land with them has been either surrendered to the forest department or is under the process of negotiations.

In the light of these facts and after an on the spot study of the present agitation, it becomes clear that the motivation behind the movement is not solely land hunger. The average holding in this area works out much better than in many other parts of the country. In some parts of West Bengal the land problem with all its attendant evils is much more acute than in Naxalbari and still there is no movement of this violent nature. The most significant fact is that the target of attack by the Communist agitators was not jotedars alone but small peasants and political opponents as well. Quite a number of Communist agitators and their sympathisers own land much above the ceiling and yet their lands are not forcibly occupied as in the case of others. Granting that the sole motivation is land hunger one would like to know why an effort was not made to get relief through the United Front Government? A Satyagraha or an Andolan of the Tradition of our national movement requires a notice to be given to those against whom it is to be conducted. Strangely enough in Naxalbari the campaign was launched just a day before the coalition ministry was sworn in and that too without notice. The Congress Government for the last 20 years had neglected the problems, both social and economic, of these millions of adivasis living in the eastern part of our country. It is hoped that the coalition government of radical parties would be best suited to right the wrong. By giving priority to these landless people we could also accelerate the process of integrating them in our social and national life. The present movement in its form would rather stifle this progress than help it. Toying with

ideas of 'free zones' and parallel authorities would create a feeling of separation which will do incalculable harm to national unity. This aspect together with the fact that Naxalbari touches the borders both of Pakistan and Nepal has attracted the attention of the whole country and the people are watching these developments in this strategic area with a sense of anxiety and alarm.

The problem of the poor and landless peasants no doubt needs a radical and speedy solution. The ceiling which is fixed at 25 acres can easily be reduced to 15 so as to make available more surplus land for distribution. In Maharashtra the ceiling for paddy land is 16 acres. Why Bengal should have it as high as 25. But let it be remembered that even after such an amendment in the existing law there will not be enough surplus land to satisfy the thousands of Adivasis. The economic and social development of the area with an emphasis on small industries, agro-industries and education is urgently necessary. Delay in this regards is dangerous to democracy and national integrity. It is true that Congress Governments are guilty of criminal negligence in this regard. But that cannot be an excuse for delaying things any further. We can do so at our own peril. The non-Congress government will forfeit their right to run the administration if they fail to take up this problem immediately and solve it speedily.

These recent developments in Naxalbari also shed a flood of light on the nature of United Front Governments and their limitations. Avowedly the West Bengal ministry is a united front ministry with constituents having fundamental differences. In the absence of a single party capable of forming a ministry several opposition parties came together with a view to provide a democratic and better alternative to the misrule of the Congress which was extremely unpopular with the masses. The like minded parties have no reasons to remain separate if they really mean business. Those who have fundamental difference will naturally try to extend their field of influence and strengthening their organisation. There is no harm in having a healthy competition to win over people to one's point of view provided rules of the land are observed. However, if any party tries to take undue advantage and uses questionable means such as violence and terrorism tensions are bound to grow. If these thing are allowed to go unchecked the tension might reach a breaking

CHAPTER 5

MOBILISE THE MASSES

WE ARE meeting after the sad and untimely demise of our beloved leader Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. The people of India who believe in Parliamentary democracy looked upon him, particularly after the fourth General Elections, as the leader who could build democratic opposition in the country. The down-trodden masses adored him as their champion who never shirked to put up a determined fight for them against all odds. The cruel hand of death has snatched him away from us when the country needed him most.

The situation that obtains today, I am inclined to say, is not merely critical but in a way explosive as well. The problem of food, shelter and employment is becoming more and more difficult for the common man. The cancer of corruption is growing and is eating the very vitals of our socio-economic systems. Our backward classes and castes continue to suffer as before at the hands of the so called high castes in several states and the economic situation is going from bad to worse. The discontent is mounting and the Congress Party which continues to rule the centre is forfeiting its moral authority which it enjoyed once upon a time. The people in general have lost faith in the Congress and its government. This was proved beyond doubt by the results of the fourth General Elections. People voted against the Congress and dethroned them in several states. This happened even when the opposition was disorganised and divided. Nevertheless the Congress retained its hold at the Centre and continues to rule the country. While they outwardly express satisfaction for the democratic spirit and vitality exhibited by the voters who set aside their misrule in several states they are secretly conspiring to usurp power in states by undemocratic means where they have lost it. West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab are instances in point. They are shedding crocodile tears for the wave of defections that is set in, but they encourage defections from other parties to their party when it suits their purpose.

In Bihar and U.P. they are actively trying to topple the non-Congress ministers by promising their support to the defectors in forming minority governments. These are examples of their anti-democratic and authoritarian behaviour and their evil designs to foist themselves and their governments on the people against their wishes. Unfortunately for them even in places where they have succeeded in unseating the non-Congress governments people have not taken kindly to them. Resistance movements are growing and will continue to gather strength in those states. In Bihar and U.P. the people are not in a mood to tolerate the Congress coming back to power by such backdoor methods. Congress leaders therefore are only staying their hands, but it should be remembered that they are lying in wait and will choose a suitable opportunity for the execution of their sinister plans and designs.

The socialist movement in the country is at the crossroads. A careful analysis of the complex situation and an assessment of social forces is essential to decide upon the right course. As our country is vast and problems differ from state to state, the policy to be followed will have to be evolved after a careful and a realistic study of the explosive situations developing in different states. The shape of crisis may be quite different in W. Bengal from that in Maharashtra or Kerala. In Kerala a critical situation may arise out of the refusal by the Central Government to give adequate supply of rice from the central quota. In Maharashtra the pot may begin to boil owing to the struggle of the people of border area for their democratic right to be included in the Maharashtra State. In Bihar the non-Congress government may come under pressure from their employees as a result of the refusal of the Central Government to give adequate financial assistance for the payment of enhanced dearness allowance on par with the Central employees. The shape of these crisis is different from each other but the basic cause is the same, namely the Congress misrule and the monopoly of power they continue to enjoy despite the fact that they have no majority vote behind them. In the absence of a strong democratic opposition and a dynamic socialist movement in the country this monopoly of power is retained by the Congress. It was in this context that Dr. Lohia appealed to all democratic socialists to unit in a single Party of Socialists and to work for the building of a strong democratic opposition through the policy of electoral

adjustments, without making any fuss over right and left in the opposition ranks. Unfortunately the leaders of different opposition parties failed to appreciate the merit of this policy and therefore that could not be implemented in a satisfactory manner. Even then the people endorsed the policy enunciated by the Samyukta Socialist Party and dislodged the Congress from power in several states.

However, after the election the opposition parties under the pressure of the public opinion agreed to form coalition governments to keep the Congress out of power. The S. S. P. by its historic Bhopal resolution urged upon its members and the non-Congress Governments that in the new situation the non-Congress ministers should do some things which will have an impact on the masses and that would help giving a uniform orientation to the mass discontent mounting in the country. It was suggested that the ministry should do certain things immediately and at least one of the few things in six months. The items to be attempted in six months were :

- (i) abolition of land revenue;
- (ii) equal primary education;
- (iii) such limits on expenditure and amenities of bigwigs that no one can spend more than Rs. 1,500 a month and nationalisation or other action without hesitation in case the limit is transferred;
- (iv) reorganisation of industry and agriculture so that the ground is prepared for an annual rate of increase exceeding 6 to 7 per cent;
- (v) the establishment of a permanent commission to enquire into properties of leaders, bureaucrats and big businessmen accumulated in the years of freedom through misuse of power and confiscation in the event of proved misuse.

It is more than 6 months now that the non-Congress governments are functioning in a number of states. It is time for us to take stock of the situation and examine whether the conditions laid down in the Bhopal resolution have been fulfilled and whether the continuance in office any further will help in mobilising and uniting the democratic and socialist forces in the country. To me it seems that while the ministries have done some good work by and large they have failed to create an appreciable impact

on the public mind, an impact that would make people prefer them to Congress.

Undoubtedly the Central Government has lost its grip over the economic and political situation. Indeed the ministries are gradually yielding to the bureaucrats even in policy matters and a creeping paralysis is coming over the administrative machinery of the State. The people are frustrated and angry; but they do not know what to do. They expressed their resentment by voting against the Congress and ousted it from power in quite a number of states, but that was not enough. In the states, various parties of the opposition with differing ideology could come together and form coalitions but they could not combine to form one composite opposition in the Parliament and therefore the most inefficient and incompetent government of the Congress which could neither provide food nor shelter to the citizens nor protect the national frontier continues in power. A desperate opposition consisting of various parties based on differing ideologies, in spite of its numerical strength fails to produce any effect in the shaping of policies of the government and their work in Parliament loses its importance. The Parliament becomes merely a forum for voicing the legitimate grievances of people. Even as a forum it will lose its significance if the struggle outside is weak or non-existent. Movements and agitations are going on outside but they are casual and superficial. Coordination of these struggles and agitations is not being seriously attempted. The responsibility for this lies mainly on the party organisations and the party workers. The party has not paid the necessary attention to this aspect. Organisational work of the party is more or less neglected.

We have not developed any organisation consciousness amongst the workers and the members of the party. Of late, our people seem to be interested only in ministries and ministers. Party workers take pleasure in hanging round them, pleading for individual grievances here and there. Combative or constructive work which ought to have been attempted in the favourable situation created by the non-Congress ministers is almost forgotten. No less a person than Dr. Lohia, our beloved leader, made an appeal to top party workers and urged them to accept the challenge posed by Sri Morarji Desai, the Union Finance Minister, to organise the constructive work of our conception

like the **BHUMI SENA** with a view to provide irrigation and other facilities to the farmers. It is regrettable that response to his call was very poor. Individual members and workers are making some effort and some of them are putting in hard work. But they have not succeeded in integrating it in the collective urges of the masses to change the existing order. I shall not call it selfishness but it smacks of careerism. Indeed the major share of responsibility in this regard has to be owned by the party leadership. I am convinced in my mind that in the present situation, our first task is party organisation to which we must apply our mind and devote the best part of our energies for it. We have failed to create new cadres inspired by the lofty ideals of a socialistic society, cadres who will be willing to sacrifice their all for the realisation of that ideal. I know we will have to start from a scratch, but it seems that that is the only way leading us on to our goal. We must never forget that it was effective mobilisation of the popular forces that gave us the strength to challenge the authority of British imperialism. If we are seriously intending to challenge successfully the incompetent and corrupt authority of the Congress Government, we have no other alternative but to mobilise the exploited masses on a national scale.

We have reached a condition where an open peaceful revolt against the unjust social and economic order becomes absolutely essential. It is not enough to offer Satyagrah or lead a procession for the solution of individual and isolated issues. These injustices and the discontent arising out of them have to be organised as an integrated struggle for the overthrow of the existing unjust and corrupt social order. When one takes up a fight for carrying on the administration, in regional languages, with a view to making the greatest number of people participate in the running of the government; the struggle for the betterment and relief of hutment dwellers is conducted; one has to know and appreciate why the problem has arisen and correlate with a broader and deeper socialist movement. When one fights against corruption in high places and blackmarketing and against the vulgar ostentations of authority and wealth we must go to the root of the disease. The struggle of the Hindi-speaking people for the use of Hindi in administration is not properly appreciated either by those who carry it on or those who participate in it. It is

not out of any sectarian motives or petty selfishness that the protagonists of Hindi are fighting. The use of Hindi will help greater mobilisation of the exploited masses against the injustices heaped on them day in and day out. But if we fail to realise this broader objective there is a danger that such movements might lead to sectarianism and create bitterness against people speaking different languages which might even endanger the unity of our country. If English is mechanically replaced by the regional language, keeping the exploited and the down-trodden masses as before, it will serve no purpose. It is with a view to injecting a fresh initiative and vigour in the popular movements and making them broad based that the languages easily understood by the people have to be used. It is hoped that it will give self-confidence to those teaming millions in their fight against injustice who have been deprived of their legitimate share in the affairs of the State. That is why the S. S. P. is advocating along with the language issue the cause of the backward classes. It was not in vain that Dr. Lohia insisted on guaranteeing to the backward classes 60 percent seats in committees and governments. In the course of language controversy there is a feeling in the country that the D. M. K. and the S. S. P. are at the two extreme ends. Little do they realise that this contradiction is more apparent than real. Essentially they have a common approach to the main problem of winning power for the down-trodden masses. Both stand for unity and democracy. Democracy demands that we be tolerant to others. The S. S. P. has made it abundantly clear that Hindi will not be imposed on the unwilling minds who, because of the wrong policies of the Congress Government have developed a resistance for it. As far as I have understood the minds of the D. M. K. friends and their thinking on this subject they too have no desire to impose English on the unwilling minds. Indeed they stand for the regional languages in the States and they also realise that a link language for the country will have to develop in course of time. It is for those who believe that Hindi should have that honour to work and give Hindi a shape to make it acceptable to our South Indian friends. The first test in this direction would be for those who stand for Hindi, to see to it that in Hindi states at least Hindi becomes the language of the administration and those who come from the non-Hindi States like Maharashtra,

Gujarat, etc., but who have agreed for Hindi as the link language should make a determined effort to enrich and develop Hindi in their own way. If they bring fresh words and idioms in Hindi it will act like flesh and bones for its development and making it easily understood by the non-Hindi people. If this is done then a link language will grow by the efforts of all other national languages and it will become easily acceptable to those who have an objection for Hindi as the link language today.

Now that the language bill has become a law it is necessary to consider the situation **de novo** and chalk out a new policy in this regard. In my view it is now time for those who stand for regional languages to make a vigorous move and to see that in the States at least all the work of administration is carried on in the regional language. In Parliament all the national languages should be given equal status and arrangement must be made for the simultaneous translation in Hindi and English. In this respect four south Indian languages should get the first priority.

The resolution on language policy which was adopted in the Parliament stands for three-language formula. I am doubtful as to how it would be implemented. Whatever that might be I would strongly urge upon all those who are eager to make Hindi the sole official language of the Union to make it a point to learn at least one of the South Indian languages apart from their regional languages. In those States where the regional language is Hindi, under the new circumstances if they do not take English it will not be necessary for them to learn any other language even to qualify themselves for government service. Would it be too much to expect that those who rejected English, should voluntarily learn at least one of the South Indian languages? If the Hindi states take up this cause enthusiastically it will go a long way in winning over those who are opposed to Hindi. Recently I had an opportunity to visit a school in Tashkent where Hindi and Urdu were taken as second languages in quite a few classes. If the Russians could do this why should we not try it on a voluntary basis? Besides assuaging the feeling of the South it will make Hindi richer with words from the four South Indian languages which naturally will find their entry in Hindi, as it was enriched by the Persian and Arabic words. That will further enable us to know intimately the people of

the South and appreciate the traditional elements in their culture. In doing this we will be helping the process of national integration.

Since I have dealt with the basic affinity between the D. M. K. and the S. S. P. and expressed my desire to help the process of coming nearer, you would naturally expect me to say something about the question of our unity with the P. S. P.. You are well aware that Dr. Lohia a few months before his death had observed that Socialist unity is not only the need of the hour but that of the minute. In other words we are dying for it. But it must be a real unity. I mean the unity of hearts and minds. At present it seems the hearts are eager to meet but the minds are fighting shy. I can well appreciate the fear of those who say that we must not do anything in haste. If we have the will to come closer it will always be possible to devise ways and means to do so. But we must do nothing that will add to the existing prejudices and misunderstanding. We of the S. S. P. have never concealed our views on issues and problems that demand solution from the socialist movement. The problem of language, liquidation of social inequality, characterisation of Congress and India's relations with Pakistan are some of the issues on which honest difference of opinion is possible. We are ever ready to discuss those things across the table and find out whether there can be a common approach and whether our minds can meet. I can only assure that on our side we shall not show the slightest unwillingness to meet them and discuss and shall make an earnest effort to come together.

When the Socialists as part of the Congress were fighting for national freedom it was realised that without maximum mobilisation of Indian masses we could not create the necessary sanction to overthrow the foreign yoke. The Socialists very soon discovered that this maximum mobilisation would be possible only if they are ready to work

- (i) for the liquidation of social disability imposed on the so called lower castes by the upper caste,
- (ii) for the emancipation of women, and
- (iii) for removal of poverty.

This threefold task, namely, overthrow of British imperialism, abolition of social inequality and the removal of poverty, it was hoped, could be achieved in one stride. The national leaders however, agreed to the partition of the country and checkmated

the revolutionary process. They went back from their words that the unity of the country would be maintained at any cost. There were two reasons for this tragic decision. In the first place, they were scared by the Hindu-Muslim riots and the consequent bloodshed of innocent people, and secondly, they were impatient to get power even at the cost of partition. But when actual division took place there was tremendous bloodshed and the problem of Hindu-Muslim concord continued to elude us as before. Law and order problem assumed the greater importance in the context of events that took place at the time of partition and consequently bureaucracy came on the top. Foreign government had withdrawn after partitioning the country, but the feeling of enmity between India and Pakistan has made it much more difficult to redeem the pledges given to the impoverished masses.

The socialists were compelled to come out of the Congress immediately after freedom to get ahead on the revolutionary road abandoned by the Congress. Even if the national movement was to continue on the revolutionary road, things would have been different than what they are today. A radical change in the socio-economic structure would have been possible if the Congress party was to pursue the Socialist policy. But the economic policy that they enunciated were such that the owning classes became more and more dominant. Ministerial officers remained in the hands of the upper castes much to the dislike of the backward communities who had hoped for their emancipation in free India. Naturally, they became jealous of the usurpers and a new process started for the dislodgement of these upper castes from seats of power. The socialists could not afford to be silent spectators of this process. With his extraordinary foresight Dr. Lohia could see the latent danger in this process. He could realise that if this struggle of the backward communities gets isolated from the socialist movement it would be weakened considerably. He therefore put forward his new famous thesis of special preference to the backward communities guaranteeing them 60 percent seats in committees and governments and other seats of powers. The S. S. P. has accepted this policy and we are convinced that it must continue to be one of the tenets of our policy for a long time to come.

During the 20 years of Congress rule we had three Five Year Plans involving expenditure of 25,000 crores. It was said that very soon we shall be reaching the take off stage, but the facts have belied these fond expectations. On the contrary, our Fourth Plan is in dole-drums. Instead of becoming self-sufficient in the matter of foodgrains we are becoming more and more dependent on foreign imports. The problems of food, shelter and employment remained unsolved. The country is spending a thousand crores of rupees on the armed forces and yet the Congress Government failed to protect our frontier when the Chinese invaded. There are millions of people in our lands who cannot enjoy even two meals a day. Unemployment is growing and the rising prices are playing havoc in the life of the common man, the victim of continuous impoverishment. Millions of our people are compelled to live in slums and unauthorised hutments. When the economic and political situation is deteriorating in this manner is it any wonder that our prestige in international sphere has gone down? The military reverses that we suffered when the Chinese invaded our northern frontiers has tarnished our image. Immediately after the achievement of freedom although the country was divided we were treated with great respect. We were looked upon as the leader of anti-imperialist movement in the colonies and those who were victims of colonialism expected a lead from us. The foreign policy of a country is naturally the extension of its domestic policy. So long as our politics were vitally connected with the urges of the exploited masses we enjoyed the confidence of the people who fought against colonialism. But when the vested interests acquired a dominant position in shaping our policy, India lost its position of power. In the beginning very rightly we decided for an independent foreign policy and rejected to join either of the power blocs.

This was styled as active non-alignment. The vigour that this active non-alignment policy exhibited when our domestic policy was rooted in the progressive urges of the exploited millions is not to be felt now owing to the failures of our plans and the wrong policies that we are pursuing. Rather than being independent we are becoming more and more dependent on the imports of foodgrains and for the aid for our plans on the big countries. Therefore it is not correct to say that

we are following an independent yet active policy of non-alignment.

The political system that has emerged after the Second World War and the equilibrium established between different states cannot go on permanently. There are certain problems which need a solution. If we fail to solve those problems civil war becomes inevitable. Various countries are divided as a result of the new equilibrium. West Germany, East Germany, South Korea, North Korea, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Bharat and Pakistan and the tension between Israel and the Arab countries are instances in point. The problem of Kashmir and the issues of certain African states who still continue to be the victims of colonialism also need a solution. If these issues are not settled by peaceful means there is danger of another war. If not a hot war at least a state of permanent preparedness for war which also means permanent poverty for the masses. If we want to solve these issues democratically and peacefully our prestige in the international sphere must go up. This can happen only if we succeed in bringing about a radical change in socio-economic structure of our Society in favour of the working masses. If we do it and make rapid progress on our path to an egalitarian society our prestige will go up inevitably. But today we are in a very unenviable position. Our non-alignment today means sometimes leaning on this block and sometimes on the other. On many occasions non-alignment is only another name for cowardice. With a view to secure foreign aid we make compromises with principles. Badshah Khan one of our great leaders and now the voice of Pakhtoons is yearning for our co-operation in his struggle against autocracy but the Congress government has no courage to extend their hand of co-operation to him, because they are afraid to antagonise some big countries. Tibet is another example. When the Chinese had invaded us and are attacking us in and out of season, there is no reason why we should not give recognition to the revolutionary Government of the Tibetans. We are having trade relations with Eastern Germany but we fight to establish full diplomatic relations with them. Why? Because we are afraid to antagonise Western powers.

Whether it is the domestic policy or the foreign policy the Congress is vacilating. They have neither the courage nor the determination and therefore the country is fast going towards disaster. The present situation needs a drastic remedy and those who decided

in favour of such a course must possess an iron will to pursue it. It is for the younger people in the party to come to the forefront, as in those days of the freedom movement, and give a revolutionary orientation to the surging waves of mass discontent. When people were hobnobbing with the idea of dominion government it was the youth in the country which came forward in favour of complete independence. It was backed up by the mass movement all over the country. Once again a radical policy and programme is becoming essential.

If India as a nation is to have a bright future the old order will have to be changed radically and the youth will have to come out openly as standard bearers of revolt against the unjust social and political structure. Those who aspire for such a revolutionary change will have to be ready to give everything and receive nothing in return. Let the socialists who stand for secularism, democracy and national integrity come together and march shoulder to shoulder towards the cherished goal. This is a hard task, but if we do not put our shoulders to it we shall not be able to change the lot of the suffering of humanity in this country. Let us go ahead with clarity of mind and dedication to duty. In conclusion I would like you to remember that the Samyukta Socialist Party has to play a very important role at this critical juncture in the history of our socialist movement. We must now concentrate our energies on the following points :

- (i) Without diluting the principal tenets of our policy we must endeavour to the best of our ability for the unity of democratic socialist forces;
- (ii) At present our minds seem to be too much occupied with the ministry making and the rest of it. The socialists must devote more and more to extra parliamentary activities, combative as well as constructive. Indeed the parliament and the legislatures are forms to ventilate the grievances and struggles of the people outside. But the priority must go to the people's movement.
- (iii) The policy of the S. S. P. to carry on the struggle of the people for justice on specific issues in co-operation with others needs to be implemented with vigour in the present situation as never before;
- (iv) It must be borne in mind that in our struggles inspite of co-operation with others the distinct identity of the

CHAPTER 6

EXPLOSIVE SITUATION IN PURNEA

DURING the regime of the first S. V. D. government in Bihar Shri Jayaprakash Narayan tried to seek the cooperation of all the parties inside the government and also of the Congress, with a view of implementing the land acts that prevailed in Bihar. But to his utter dismay he found that even some of the constituents in the S. V. D. were not ready to implement the provisions of the legislation that had been passed during the Congress regime. This is an indication of the dominating position that the landed interests are today occupying in the affairs of Bihar whatever be the professions of the government. We, therefore, decided to have an on the spot study of the situation. We selected the district of Purnea for the special situation that it occupies today. Purnea is flanked on the one side by the Naxalbari area in West Bengal and on the northern side of the district lies an almost open border of Nepal. From the point of view of land relations and disparity in land holdings Purnea also is one of the worst affected districts in Bihar.

Prior to the abolition of Zamindari the zamindars were owning thousands of acres of land. Their tenants and sub-tenants were very much exploited. Although zamindari is formally abolished even today this district displays a picture wherein a few individuals own more than 5000 acres of land each. Further those who cultivate their land as crop-sharers are forced to make their living by cultivating small pieces of land ranging from half an acre to five or six acres at the most and the tenure of which is also not guaranteed. In each village one comes across one or two big land holding families with spacious buildings in cement concrete and the rest of the villagers living in bamboo hutments and struggling for their living on the small piece of land as crop-sharers of the big landlords. According to Bihar Tenancy Act it has been provided that those cultivators who have been crop sharers on the landlords' land for a period

of more than 12 years should be designated as permanent tenants and the other crop sharers, also according to the Act, are given a guarantee of tenure which is known as sikami. But even after the passing of this Act no efforts were made to confer these tenancy rights on the crop-sharers. This district of Purnea therefore saw a great agitation of the crop-sharers in the late fifties, as a result of which a survey was ordered by the Government of Bihar to record the rights of the crop-sharers. The domination of the landed interests is so great that at the time of the survey, it is explained, nearly half the crop-sharers' names could not be recorded. With great efforts the remaining crop-sharers could get their names recorded either as sikami or permanent but the landed interests in league with the local administration are using all means to deprive these crop-sharers of the all too inadequate rights which they had won.

It would be interesting to find how these landed interests resort to various methods of force and litigation by the help of which they have ejected hundreds of these crop-sharers. A few significant instances will not be out of place here to clarify the point. In the village of Kursela which we first visited we were told that the landed interests have been successful in ejecting crop-sharers not only from their land but also from the land which was given to the cultivators in Bhoojan. Near this village a small hamlet was established to rehabilitate the people whose land and houses were washed away by the change in the course of the Ganga. In this hamlet known as Samaraitola 186 families have been rehabilitated on a plot of 10 acres. Since they have no means of livelihood they are cultivating the land of big landlord by paying him rent of Rs. 360/- per bigha. This money they have to get from the same landlord at an exorbitant rate of interest and he deducts this rate and also the capital from the produce and the landlord thus recovers his capital and rent from the produce which the cultivator produces with great efforts and at the end is left with almost nothing and has again to go to the landlord for further loan and the vicious circle goes on. In another village named Sanghimari we came across a very ingenious method of exploiting the crop-sharers. There the landlord had employed a crop-sharer from the distant village. The crop-sharer has to cultivate the land and part with half of the produce to the landlord. He is supposed to

get the remaining half of the same for him but he is also robbed of this part by way of rent for the pair of bullocks which the landlord is so pleased to give this poor crop-sharer on hire. Further, the landlord also gives him some rice to maintain his family during the rainy season but this he recovers at the rate of $7\frac{1}{2}$ seers for every 6 seers given to him. And this is also recovered from his portion of the produce. Naturally at the end he is left with nothing for himself and circumstances force him to be naturally dependent like a surf on the landlord. In a village called Sheikhpura we came across an incident where both force and litigation were used to evict nearly 18 crop-sharers from the land of Mukhia. This fellow has used his own private army to forcefully evict some of the poor crop-sharers and has also resorted to filing title suits in the civil court with a view to harass the poor cultivators. If after all this force and trouble the crop-sharer displays the courage to stick to his land then litigation is resorted to. According to the Act the crop-sharer is supposed to pay 7/20th of his produce to the landlord. But nowhere did we come across a case where the landlord is satisfied with this portion and is ready to pass a receipt. Almost invariably the cultivator has to part with 50 per cent of his produce and that too without a receipt and then the landlord files a suit for non-payment of his portion. In many cases the administration is completely in the pocket of the landlord and the issuing of summons, giving of notice to the crop-sharer etc. is manoeuvred behind his back and mostly ex-party decisions are awarded. If after that the cultivator is somehow alerted and goes in an appeal then he cannot be a match both in the matter of time and money to the big landlord. Because in the court he has to engage a pleader, appear for every date, spend his money and time. Thus after four or five dates he becomes exasperated and voluntarily surrenders his rights so that the landlord may not physically deprive him of his means of livelihood. Instances of this sort can be piled up to make a huge volume. Today more than 69,000 title suits either for non-payment of rent, or wrongful possession of land are pending in various courts of Purnea district, and the crop-sharers as a class are harassed and tired out.

The landed interests in the Purnea district have today become

more greedy of land because of growing irrigation facilities on account of the Kosi canal. More than 15 lakhs of acres of land is being irrigated and is likely to yield double or even three times the produce. The landlords are trying to grab more and more land. When this was reported to Acharya Vinoba Bhave when we had gone to see him during our visit he very aptly remarked that the hearts of the landlords are drying up in the same proportion as the land is being watered. As a result the crop-sharers are put to greater hardships. But their does not seem to be any effective remedy in the immediate future. The greed of the landlord is so great that they are also grabbing by illegal means the land belonging to the Government of Bihar. In the district of Purnea thousands of acres of cultivable government land is lying fallow and according to the declared policy of the government it is to be given to the landless and needy persons. But according to the procedure the village mukhia and the panchayat samiti and the B. D. O. are to recommend to the government as to whom this land should be distributed. Although thousands of landless persons have put in their applications for this land none of these functionaries are making any recommendations in their favour. On the contrary we came across cases where big landlords by bribing these functionaries have recorded their names for even fallow government land. In case they cannot get their names recorded they bring in all sorts of obstructions in the way to record the names of the landless persons. Due to this we witness in Bihar today a situation where thousands of acres of fertile land is lying fallow. Hundreds of landless families are eager to cultivate land and produce the necessary foodgrains but nothing is being done here at a time when the country is going about with a begging bowl to feed her millions. The landed interests are so much blinded by the self-interest that they do not bother as to what will happen to the country. In a village called Parora we came across an incident where a landlord due to his manoeuvre and litigation has allowed nearly 35 acres of land to lie fallow but would not permit the crop-sharer to cultivate it. This is a general picture in the district today. On an average in every village one would find that nearly 5 to 10 acres of land is lying fallow because the landlords would not allow the crop-sharers to cultivate it.

Bihar Government has passed an Act by which the land on which anybody has constructed his home was guaranteed to him as the homestead land but this law also is observed more in violation and a number of poor cultivators and specially the harijans are forcefully evicted from their homestead land. In a village named Parora we came across a case where 36 harijan families had constructed their hutments on a plot of land and they had possessed a certificate that it was their homestead land. In spite of this the landlord forcefully demolished their hutments and all of them were thrown out on the street. The police and the B. D. O. instead of giving protection to the poor harijans asked them to construct their homes on another plot of land which was being cultivated by one of the harijan crop-sharers. Thus the poor fellows lost their means of livelihood and the landlord is illegally occupying more than 2 acres of land which legally belonged to the 36 families of harijans and nothing is being done about this.

In another village called Borth-her the landlord is reported to have used tractors thereby ejecting the crop-sharers on the land which they were cultivating. It was widely complained that well-to-do landlords in Purnea are making use of tractors for the cultivation of their land which results in the eviction of a large number of crop-sharers.

Already in the district of Purnea the distribution of land between the big holders and the small peasants is very uneven. The Ceiling Act which is supposed to limit the size of the holdings of an individual has become a mockery here. There are individuals owning more than 10 thousand acres of land without the Ceiling Act ever touching them. Many landlords have resorted to make distribution to Bemani persons in order to avoid the provisions of the Ceiling Act. In Bihar today less than 5 per cent families are controlling 1/3rd of the land and this proportion is still more uneven in the district of Purnea. The landed interests are so very strong that in one or two villages on the border of Nepal we found that landlords who were citizens of Nepal could also influence Indian officers of Purnea for the eviction of crop-sharers who happened to be Indian citizens. It will not be exaggeration to say that in Purnea district it is really the big landlords who are ruling and the laws and administration of the government of Bihar cannot

touch them. The situation can be put like this that Purnea is an inverted Naxalbari. Whereas in Naxalbari the extremist elements in the communist party had paralysed the administration and took the law in their own hands here in Purnea the extremist elements among the landlords have taken the law in their own hands and have pocketed the administration. They are employing their own private armies and a sort of reaction has been set in. What is happening in Purnea today is that whatever little rights the crop-sharers had gained during the last 20 years by continuous struggle are being snatched away from them by a collusion between landlords and the local administration. Actually the landlords have organised a sort of three-tier machinery by which they are depriving the crop-sharers of their meagre rights. First during the period of survey they bribed the surveyors and stopped a large number of names of crop-sharers from being recorded in the Government records. Secondly, they used their own private armies and with the connivance of the police and in certain cases with their help forcefully and illegally evicted a large number of crop-shares whose names were recorded and who possessed requisite certificate by looting their crop, pulling down their huts and by use of all sorts of intimidation. If some crop-sharers showed the courage to stick to their guns in spite of this vandalism then the landlords resort to the method of litigation. Taking advantage of the ignorance of the crop-sharers and by pocketing the men of the administration a large number of decrees have been secured by the landlords whereby the courts have ordered eviction of crop-sharers.

This is in short situation in Purnea today. No doubt there are some sporadic eruptions whereby the desperate and exploited crop-sharers indulge in some sort of violence with a view to protect their rights. When this happens the landed interests and the sophisticated gentry create a hue and cry in the name of law and order. But no one seems to be worried about the general defiance by the landed interests of the existing laws relating to tenancy, ceiling, wages and money lending. It is apprehended that if this sorry state of affairs is not set right peacefully the aggrieved people may be driven, whether one likes it or not, to seize their rights by force. No one who believes in democracy can welcome such a contingency.

But it is no use to keep simply prattling about democracy. Something concret and immediate has to be done. It is gratifying that Mr. S. M. Joshi, the Chairman of the Samyukta Socialist Party recently conducted a study tour of this district and proposes to devote his energies with a view to find out the peaceful solution for this problem. He also had a prolonged discussion with Acharya Vinoba Bhave who is coming today in Purnea district and it is hoped that the efforts of Mr. S. M. Joshi and the blessings of Acharya Vinoba Bhave may bring about a peaceful solution for the distress of the crop-sharers and another Naxalbari may be avoided. Howsoever calm the situation might appear today the discontent that is boiling among the crop-sharers and harijans of this area is likely to explode one day if a peaceful solution is not evolved immediately.

This article was written by Shri B. N. Rajhans and appeared in the *Times of India*, May 1968. Shri Rajhans accompanied Shri S. M. Joshi in his tour of Purnea district. Later both of them took keen interest in the land liberation movement conducted by the S. S. P. in this district in and after August 1970. They also organised a Bhoomi Sena Camp in this district to work out a peaceful alternative to the Naxalbari cult.

CHAPTER 7

DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATION OF THE NORTH EAST REGION

THE PROBLEMS of North-East region in India viz. Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Nefia etc. are very complicated and need a very careful, dynamic and integrated approach. The socialists in India cannot run away from this responsibility. They must evolve a policy for this area. In this report submitted by Shri B. N. Rajhans to the National Committee of S.S.P. some suggestions are made. A study team consisting of Shri S. M. Joshi, B. N. Rajhans and Maharaajsingh toured this area between 8th March and 20th March 1968. After the tour this report was submitted.

1. MANIPUR

BEFORE ANALYSING the political situation in Manipur it would be worthwhile to have some idea as regards the people and geographical conditions of this State. This state is situated in the Eastern-most part of the country, on the border of Burma and on the Northern side of Manipur lies Nagaland. Manipur is inhabited by a number of hill tribes and also by large number of people living in the plains. Out of a total of 8,000 sq. miles of the State nearly 7,000 sq. miles are hilly areas and the plains constitute hardly a thousand square miles. Of the total population of about 8 lakhs 5 lakhs live in the plains and about 3 lakhs in the hills. The people of the plains are known as Matai and have their own language and culture. They also have a long history going back to the days of Mahabharat, wherein the mention of Babruwahan is made who was supposed to be the king of Manipur. In the hills area a number of tribes such as the Nagas, the Huar, the Kukies are living mostly in their traditional way. However, a large number of tribals have been converted to Christianity which has a sort of dual influence on the tribals. The leadership of the tribals is mostly in the hands of the Christians, who are gradu-

ally taking to modern ideas and modern ways of living. The leaders from Nagaland both of the underground and of the legal government have a considerable amount of influence over the tribals in Manipur. It may be mentioned here that the Nagaland Government is claiming parts of Manipur to be included in the State of Nagaland. Further, on the Western side of Manipur Rani Gaidelu who belongs to the Zelien ground tribe wants a separate district for her tribe to be carved out from areas of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam where her tribe is claimed to be in majority. On the Southern side the Hmars National Union is demanding a Hmar district to be constituted of areas from Manipur, Cachar district and Mizo district in which they claim that Hamars are a majority. Apart from absence of any developmental activity the people from the hills have been completely neglected during the last twenty years. There are no roads, very few schools and hospitals in the hill area. Mr. Prasad who is the Chief Commissioner of Manipur for the last many years entertains very strange ideas about the development of the people from the hills. He is of the opinion that unless the people from the hills are forced to leave the hills and come down to the plains they cannot be developed and modernised. Naturally in his regime the hill areas are still more neglected. Regarding the paucity of roads it may be mentioned here that the Manipur Government had planned a road from Imphal to Silchar which was supposed to be completed in the first Five Year Plan. Now after the completion of three Plans even half of this road is not complete. Regarding the dearth of other communications there are no telephonic and telegraphic facilities even at the various sub-divisional headquarters of Manipur. Manipur has in all ten sub-divisions, out of which six are in hilly areas. When we were at Imphal we were told that in the Temlong sub-division a bridge had collapsed nearly a week ago but no officer had even gone to inspect it, let alone repairing the same. In other sub-divisions when local tribals came to the S. D. O. with their complaints and cases they were asked to come on some future dates. This method of tiring the people by the Officers of bureaucracy has led many tribal people to be under the influence of the underground who dispose of their cases on the spot.

Regarding economic situation in Manipur the hills have a

lot of potential for industrial development. A large number of fruits like oranges, pineapples are grown in abundance but since there are no proper facilities for marketing or preserving and canning these fruits, they are sold at the time of the season at a very meagre price. We were told that at the peak of the season one can purchase 20 oranges or 8 pineapples for a rupee. In the hilly areas the bamboo is grown in abundance which could be utilised for the manufacture of pulp and paper. There has been a persistent demand from the people in Manipur for the setting up of a pulp and paper factory. But it still remains unattended. In the plains the people take one crop of rice and for the rest of the year they have no work. If irrigation facilities could be provided these people could take two or even three crops and help increase food production of the country and raise their own standard of life. As it rains heavily in a large part of the State, water can be stored and diverted for irrigation purposes. But nothing has been done in this regard too. In the matter of employment also, the young generation in Manipur is facing great difficulties. There are about a dozen colleges and 100 high schools in this part, but no avenues of employment. Even in the Manipur Rifles which are supposed to look after the security of this area, it was alleged that due to the influence of the Chief Commissioner, who comes from Bihar, a large number of Biharis were recruited when young Manipuris were available and willing. As a result of these 20 years of misrule and neglect on the one hand and the activities carried on by the underground Nagas on the other, Manipur today faces a very grave situation. There is a feeling of estrangement between the people from the hills and the people from the plains. Frustration has given rise to a yearning for separation, also among a section of the people from the plains. The Government of India seems to have been indifferent to the gravity of the situation here and the Chief Commissioner who is said to have some godfathers in the Home Ministry, is ruling with a big stick. Some efforts on a popular level are being made to bring about closer contacts and integrations between the plains and the hills. A Manipur Cultural Integration Conference was held some time in December, 1967 at the initiative of some young intellectuals in Imphal. The Conference sent out goodwill missions to various hilly areas of Manipur

such as Ukhrool, Maomaran, Temlong and Tengopal. These missions had contacts with local tribals and village chiefs, church leaders and efforts are being made to develop an integrated Manipuri community. Also a Village Volunteer Force of young Naga volunteers is being organised for the protection of the villages from the attacks and atrocities of the underground. This activity is more intensive in the Ukhrool area where about a thousand volunteers are trained and recruited. Even here we were told that the Government attitude is very apathetic. In an encounter with underground Nagas three young boys of VVF who happened to be the only sons of their parents were killed. The Government took more than two weeks to pay off the paltry amount which was sanctioned for the burial of the young boys and nothing has been done to look after their parents. The VVF volunteers are being financed by the villagers and only the group leaders are paid by the Government. About their remuneration also there is some discontent. While Government is very apathetic to all such voluntary efforts which would build up a strong and integrated community in this area which would be helpful for the defence of our borders they seem to be very lenient to the foreign missionaries who are alleged to have played a lot of mischief in this area. We were told that at Chorchandpur in Manipur a foreign mission is being allowed to construct an air-conditioned building for a college called Sielmat College. This mission is allowed even to import asbestos sheets from U. S. A. The whole project is going to cost 4 crores of rupees and the authorities of this college are so biased that they refused permission for using their hall for a lecture by Swami Lokeshwaranand who was touring the area at the instance of the Director of Publicity to propagate the idea of national integration. No action is being taken against such anti-national tendencies. As a result a section even from the Maitai people who have long cultural contacts with the rest of India due to their language and religion, are also beginning to think of separation.

It must be borne in mind that the situation in Manipur will have to be tackled very carefully because it is flanked on the one side by the Naga underground and on the other side by the Mizo underground. The Kuki tribe which is dispersed in several villages in the southern part of Manipur and has

something of a nomadic inclination is in good number, has close affinities with the Mizos and if proper action is not taken before it is too late, the violent eruption of discontent in the Mizo districts can also spread to the Manipur area. Manipur people today are demanding the status of a full-fledged constituent state in the Union because they have experienced that under the Union Territory rule they are completely neglected. A united front of various political parties and a section of dissident Congressmen has been formed to agitate for this demand. The local unit of our party has taken a lead in this matter. They have planned a political conference for the whole Manipur State in which the demand will be given a final shape and a programme for direct action would be chalked out. They also feel that Manipuri language should be included in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution and a separate university should be established in Manipur. At present the colleges are governed by the Gauhati University. Consequently higher education in Manipur is completely neglected. The medium of instruction is English but we found that not only the students in the colleges but even some of the lecturers cannot properly and adequately express themselves in English. Naturally the young educated boys in Manipur cannot compete in the All India Services and they are therefore isolated and frustrated. All these feelings of frustration and disintegrationed separation will have to be combated with the help of a popular agitation based on legitimate and democratic aspirations of the people. We feel that the demand for a Statehood for Manipur can also be integrated with the aspirations of the Mhar tribe and the Zeliongrag. A proper scheme in which these various hill tribes could be fitted as autonomous districts in the State of Manipur will have to be worked out, in consultation with the people concerned. The party must also help the local unit in framing the development plan for the State in which the raw-material potential in the State could be fully utilised and employment avenues could be made available. An agitation based on the demands of statehood for Manipur and a balanced plan for the development of the hills and the plains will radically change the mind of the people in this area and if these aspirations are fulfilled this State of militant traditions will be one of the important backbones of our defence of the Eastern frontiers. This scheme,

however, will have to be integrated into a wider plan for the whole of the North East Area which we propose to discuss at a later stage.

2. NAGALAND

We left Imphal on the 9th afternoon and reached Kohima, capital of Nagaland, on the same day. Before discussing the situation in Nagaland a brief historical sketch of the demands of the Naga people would not be out of place. The Nagas are a number of tribal communities belonging to the same stock. Various Naga tribes such as the Angami, Sema, Ao, Zeliang, Chakhesong, Pachury, Lotha, Rangma, Konyak, Phom, Cheng, Yimchunger, Sangtai are today spread over Nagaland. Nagaland which was previously under the rule of the Assam Government is composed of about 5,000 sq. miles and its population is about 4 lakhs. Various tribes are supposed to have migrated here either from Tibetan area or from the Shan District. They are of the Mongolian race and speak different dialects. Prior to the advent of the Christianity they worshipped various deities and animals. All along history they have been a free and fighting people with their own tribal discipline. Even the British rulers could not subjugate these people. When the British left India the sovereignty was handed over to the two states of India and Pakistan and the various princes in the sub-continent. Nagaland along with the rest of India came under the Indian Union, and the sovereignty over the area in which the Nagas live was handed over to the Indian Union. A section of the Nagas, however, under the leadership of Mr. Phizo claimed that the Nagas are a sovereign people and needs sovereign state completely independent of the India Union. They also claim that Mr. Phizo met Mahatma Gandhi in 1946 when this claim was pressed. Mr. Phizo is reported to have told Mahatma Gandhi that the Nagas would declare independence on 14th August 1947 a day prior to the declaration of India's Independence. On this Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have retorted to him as to why Mr. Phizo wanted to wait till 14th August. By this retort Gandiji meant to convey to him that the so-called Naga Independence was dependent on India's being free. Another proof of British sovereignty over the Naga

area was the battle of Kohima, which has been a very important military centre and it was here that the British fought back the invading Japanese Army in the World War II. We witnessed a very well kept cemetery in Kohima where more than 2900 soldiers were killed in the battle of Kohima. Thus Mr. Phizo's claim of sovereign Nagaland was baseless. Naturally at the time of our Independence Mr. Phizo's demands had not sufficient roots among the Naga people. However, a large number of Baptist Missions, mostly from the U. S. A. working in this area had been slowly building up the concept of a free Nagaland. It is really unfortunate that the Government of India did not do anything to counter this activity. On the contrary while foreign missions were allowed free admission and movement in this area other Indian nationals were prohibited from entering the Naga area. This attitude coupled with indifferent and unimaginative rule of the Assam Government, has only helped the separatist and divisive elements among the Nagas. It must be borne in mind that from the very beginning our Government has paid very little heed to the legitimate demands of such sections among the Nagas who have been loyal to the Indian Union. After the adoption of the constitution, the people in the Nagaland were demanding the status of the autonomous district as per the 6th schedule of the Constitution in the State of Assam. But the then Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Vishnu Ram Medhi opposed any such idea and wanted to rule the Nagas with the help of a big stick. A large number of experts now feel that had this demand of the autonomous Naga District been agreed to at that time the situation would not have deteriorated as of today. Since that demand was turned down, the extremists under the leadership of Mr. Phizo got an upper hand. The Naga National Council of which Mr. Phizo is the President, even declared the Independent Federal Government of Nagaland sometime in 1955 and since then the armed revolt is being carried on in this part of the country. When the underground violent movement began to take roots, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru offered them the Scottish type of autonomous district. But the situation now had developed to such an extent that even this offer was not accepted. It must be noted here that a section of young educated Nagas who were itching for the fulfilment of their urges could easily have been won over had

their legitimate demands been accepted in time. Being frustrated, this section joined the underground and it must be said to their credit that they organised parallel army and Government in spite of all odds. After prolonged and protracted negotiations, the Government of India agreed in 1963 to constitute a fullfledged State of Nagaland in the Indian Union by negotiating with the Naga Peoples Convention and Naga National Organisation. The Naga National Organisation is mostly manned by moderate young elements in the community who want to live in peace in the Indian Union, but would like to have sufficient opportunities for their development. The granting of a state of Nagaland could fulfil their aspirations.

During our visit to Kohima we had an opportunity to meet the Chief Minister and a number of his colleagues who are today running the administration of the State. These young and energetic ministers have achieved a lot of things during the last four years of their existence. When the Nagaland Government was installed the State had roads of only 66 km. During the Plan period about 460 miles of new roads have been constructed. Thus they have built up communications, transport facilities and expanded educational facilities. They have also gone ahead with the plans for setting up a pulp factory and a sugar mill. Regarding educational expansion in a population of 4 lakhs it is surprising to note that 90,000 boys are undergoing education at different levels. They are definitely aware that these boys after completing their education will need employment which can be provided only under conditions for peaceful development. Therefore establishment of peace is their top priority.

This realisation also seems to have come to a section of the underground also. In Kohima we met Mr. Scatoshew who was a Prime Minister of the Federal Government before that Government was dissolved by the so-called decree of Federal President Mr. Meisieu. There are today two clear and distinct currents among the underground Nagas. One led by Scato Shew, Gen. Kaito and Kagato Sukhai. All these three persons were holding important positions in the Federal Government and even fighting with the Indian Army. They have also participated in the negotiations with the Government of India and have now come to realise that their problems cannot be solved by violence and armed

actions. They want a negotiated settlement with the Government of India. But there is another section which is at present led by Mr. Ingkimeron and Mesieu. This hard section is intent on achieving a free and independent Nagaland. We had an opportunity to meet Mr. Ingkimeron who is only second to Mr Phizo in their hierarchy. But they were not open for any arguments; they did not seem interested in development and wanted to continue the armed struggle though they did not say so specifically. With this in view they have built up contacts with the Chinese. The Chinese have already trained about 150 Naga rebels who said to have returned to Nagaland with training and arms. A batch of another 500 rebels is under training in China and Mr. Jehato who is supposed to be a political leader in the underground has also gone over to China. We were also told that the underground are now recruiting teenagers with a view to indoctrinate them in a Chinese way. This is really a very serious state of affairs and even the Church leaders who had in the initial stages helped and encouraged the underground are today scared at this new development. But it seems that the Church leaders have lost their grip over the diehard section of the undergrounds. Gen. Kaito has recently issued a Statement condemning the efforts to take help from the Chinese. But this moderate section among the underground is also not very clear regarding their political perspective. It may be that they do not want to come out openly in this regard because they might be afraid that such a step would be misused by their hard section. A dialogue, however, is at present being carried on between the moderate underground section and the leaders of the Nagaland Government and they hope that they would shortly arrive at some definite conclusions. We however, felt that the hesitant and indecisive attitude of the Government of India may prolong this process. It should be the duty of the Government of India and the leaders of various political parties to help and strengthen the Nagaland Government under Mr. T. N. Angami. In the past they were let down by the Union Government when over their heads they started negotiating with the underground. The undergrounds thought that Mr. Angami's Government were a non-entity. Even during the negotiations it seems some ICS officers in the External Affairs Ministry thought that it was only Mr. Phizo who would deliver the goods and

therefore they were cold in their dealings with Kaito and Suhai, thereby weakening the case of moderate undergrounds. Such unimaginative and anti-national handling of the situation in the External Affairs Ministry has all along worsened and deteriorated the situation in Nagaland. We must also admit that apart from the Government no political party or leader has shown any interest in the affairs of Nagaland. The Chief Minister and his colleagues were very happy to see that a Member of Parliament and a leader of an all India Party like Mr. Joshi and his colleagues were showing keen interest in their problems. This was clear from the great hospitality that was shown to us. They also urged upon us to persuade other men in the public life of our country to visit Nagaland and try to understand their problems.

There are today 4 currents in the public life of Nagaland :

- (1) The Government of Nagaland is completely loyal to the Union and wants to develop their state in a peaceful manner.
- (2) The Church leaders who were originally behind the underground have begun to realise the dangers in the situation and can be won over our side. It was indeed the leaders of the Church who brought about cease fire between the underground and the army. Some of them, however, are not ready to make any definite political commitment. A section of the Church Group like the Headmaster of the Baptist English School in Kohima has realised the danger of the situation and wants to take a strong attitude against the underground.
- (3) The third current is of moderate section in the underground who are convinced about the futility of the armed struggles but yet are in two minds regarding their political policy. If however, the Government of Nagaland is strengthened and a feeling of security is brought about in the area these three currents can be united on the side of the Indian Union.
- (4) The fourth current is that of the diehard undergrounds. Today there is actually a dual authority in the Nagaland. The legal Government and the underground rebels. The Government is not in a position to protect the people from the underground attacks. The Nagaland Government has today only two battalions and they have asked

for three more battalions but the Government of India has not yet conceded to this demand. We feel that this demand must be conceded. Further the Naga National Organisation refers to a 16-point agreement with the Government of India in which an assurance is said to have been given regarding the redrawing of the boundaries of Nagaland in connection with Assam and Manipur. This agreement needs to be examined and legitimate assurances there need to be immediately fulfilled.

The Nagaland Government is interested in establishing peace and security in the villages. Recently they have arrested some 19 workers who were indulging in violence and were intimidating the villagers. For this purpose they need more police. Lastly, their demand for a separate Governor for Nagaland also deserves to be conceded. This would serve a double purpose. It would be helpful for those who want to live in the Indian Union to show the rebels their important status and a separate Governor for Nagaland will also be useful to the Government of India from the security and intelligence point of view. Another way to strengthen the relation of Nagaland with the rest of India will be to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Gandhi Centenary Functions. Already a State Committee for this purpose has been formed. If the responsible persons from the Central Committee for this purpose take genuine interest in the functions so far as Nagaland is concerned, a lot could be done. Gandhiji's life and teaching could be spread by giving talks to school children and exhibiting documentary films etc. This will also be helpful to counter the anti-national sentiments existing in the area. Another means to develop closer contact of Nagaland with the rest of India is the spread of Hindi. Though Nagaland has adopted English as its state language we did not notice any resistance towards Hindi as in Tamilnad. On the contrary the vast number of educating youngsters of this state confined wider avenues in the rest of the country only through Hindi. This is being realised by some leaders of the present Nagaland Government.

We think that the Nagaland question can be effectively solved only by political action and peaceful means. It is very difficult to bow down these people by the use of arms. First, the terrain is very difficult for the Indian Army. Secondly, it is not possible

to starve off the Nagas, who can live on anything. There are 122 types of different leaves and 50 types of different roots obtainable in the jungles. On these the Nagas can pull on. Further they eat anything from a crow to an elephant. They are a proud people who will try to fight to the last man. The army, therefore, can solve the issue only if the whole race is exterminated, which is neither possible nor desirable. Indeed these militant and verile people can be a very good defence for our borders if they are kept contended and won over. We therefore suggest that in the framework of the Indian Union every effort should be made to accommodate the aspirations of the Naga people.

The granting of the status of an autonomous state of the Indian Union to areas like Manipur or Nagaland is objected to by certain leaders on the ground that such small units cannot be economically viable. But this is only a subterfuge to continue the rule of the vested interest on such areas. Actually economic viability today is a misnomer because even the Government of India have to depend on foreign aid for our development and food. Therefore the argument of economic viability should not be allowed to come in the way of fulfilling the legitimate political aspirations of the Nagas. Secondly, we must consider the Naga problem from the more wider aspect of National Security. India must try to isolate the diehard Nagas from the other three currents in Nagaland. The other three currents can be united and won over to our side only on the basis of broadest possible autonomy to them in the framework of the Union Constitution. On this basis the rest of India should take steps to strengthen the Nagaland Government and give them sufficient financial assistance in order to so develop the state that the Nagas will entertain a sense of belonging towards the Indian Union. Simultaneously we must carry on energetic and systematic efforts to develope more social and cultural contacts between Nagaland and the rest of India because a strong, contended and integrated state of Nagaland will be the real bulwark of our border defence.

3. ASSAM

From Kohima we proceeded to Assam. Our first halt was at Golaghat. Golaghat is situated in the Sibsagar district which

is on the border of Nagaland. Nagaland claims a part of the jungle east of the railway line which passes through this district. Naturally a few Nagas live in this area along with other tribal and backward communities, especially the Ahoms. Most of these people are landless and they have been demanding of the Government of Assam that they should be given cultivable land from the forest area. All these days the Government of Assam had taken a rigid bureaucratic attitude that since this was a reserved forest land would not be given to anybody. Ultimately the landless people forced their entry and distributed the land among themselves. It must be said to the credit of the local unit of the S. S. P. that the distribution was done so orderly and equitably that nobody was allowed to take more than an economic unit of 10 bighas. After all this agitation, the Assam Government issued an order on February 12, stating that a strip of about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ miles in the forest would be opened for distribution of land to the needy. Actually the Government should have regularised the encroachment of all those who had occupied the land, since they were all needy and landless. But in the usual unimaginative manner they issued ejectment notices on all who had occupied the land and after ejection the D.C. would verify the cases as to whether they were needy or not. This had annoyed the peasant and the day we reached Golaghat, they offered Satyagrah against this ejectment. The officers at Golaghat, instead of taking a sympathetic attitude towards these Satyagrahis, severely lathi-charged them. We met the D.C. and tried to impress on him as to why the Government must give special consideration to the demands of these people because they were coming from a very vulnerable area. These people were living along our disturbed borders and it was necessary to fulfil their legitimate demands and aspirations, so that their discontent is not exploited by the enemy. But the Government of Assam is hardly alive to this situation. On the contrary the whole situation in Assam has been complicated and deteriorated because the rulers in Assam have totally neglected the legitimate demands and aspirations of the various tribals and backward sections in the State.

Assam is a heterogeneous and cosmopolitan unit of our country. We have got on both sides of the State the various hill peoples and in the valley of the Brahmaputra people belonging to different

races and tribes make their living. On the northern borders are the NEFA area which are touching the Chinese border. This is a large area of 30 thousand square miles inhabited by about five lakhs of people belonging to a number of tribes of Mongolian descent. In the south, we have got the Garo hills, the Khasi hills, the Mikar and north Cachar hills on the border of East Pakistan. Then there is Cachar district and Tripura Union Territory which are on the Eastern border of East Pakistan. Down below are Mizo hills surrounded on the one side by Pakistan and on the other by Burma. In these hilly areas live about 16 lakhs of people belonging to different hill tribes. Now the Government of Assam has never been able to assimilate these people into the body politic of Assam. The people along the hills have always lived a free life and their culture and traditions differ from those of the people of the plains. In the past there was very little communication between the people from hills and the plains and as a result a lot of misunderstanding existed on both sides. Therefore, at the time of framing our Constitution a committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Shri Gopinath Bardoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam to suggest ways and means for the preservation of the culture and the fulfilment of aspirations of these people. On the recommendation of this Committee, the Constitution has provided for a status of autonomous districts for these hilly areas whereby they are given legislative powers and functions in regard to some subjects which are mentioned in the VIth Schedule. But since these districts were to function under the Government of Assam, the district councils later never allowed these to be really effective and consequently the people from the hills have nourished a feeling that they are treated as second class citizens.

During the British rule the Britishers had deliberately pursued a policy of segregation and the people from the hills had been kept aloof from the mainstream of Indian politics. The hilly areas were very little affected by the freedom struggle and the people from the hills had some amount of faith in the British people as apart from the people from the plains. This was perhaps due to the spread of Christianity among the tribal people. On the eve of Independence when the tribals realised that the British were going to quit they began to think about their relations with the rest of India. For that purpose the different tribes

also began to think of coming together and evolving a common approach. But the conditions among various tribes were so very different, for instance, the Jantia Hills Sub-division was under the direct British rule, whereas among the Khasis, there were numerous native chiefs. Sardar Patel, however, obliterated the problem of native chiefs as he did in the rest of the country, and the hilly areas were included in different district councils of Assam. The absence of a strong and determined leadership among the tribes and lack of purposeful and enlightened direction from the Government of Assam had, however, turned the District Councils most ineffective. The people from the hills, therefore, began to think in terms of a separate Hill State with the status of a full-fledged constituent of the Indian Union.

A Hill State consisting of Assam hills, NEFA and Nagaland might have been the correct solution of the political aspirations of the people from the hills. Such a case was placed before the State Reorganization Commission. Had this demand been conceded it would have brought about a smooth and gradual process of emotional integration among all the tribes on the one hand and of the tribals with the rest of India on the other. The States Reorganisation Commission's apprehension that such a state would become a Christian State and which might develop extra-territorial loyalties was both unfounded and contray to the principle of secularism. But Shri Pannikar's anti-American bias seems to have played a decisive role and we lost an opportunity. Having lost the opportunity to bring about an integrated Hill State, we are today faced with the demands of different States from the Assam hills, the Nagaland, Mizoland, Manipur, etc.

Be that as it may the fact remains that there has been very little development in the hill areas during the last twenty years. The aspirations of the people from the hills therefore, remained unfulfilled and a sense of acute discontent and frustration began to overcome them. The foreign missionaries who were the only outsiders who worked among these people only helped to encourage the already existing feelings of frustration and separatism. The demand for a separate Hill State, therefore, began to grow stronger. The passing of the 'Official Languages Act' by the Government of Assam served as a breaking point. The people from the hills thought, wrongly though, that the recognition to Assamese as the official language of the State was an effort to

impose on them the permanent rule of the people from the plains. To resist this the people from the hills constituted an organisation called the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference at Shillong in July 1960. They submitted a memorandum to the President in August 1960, demanding a separate Hill State. They also met Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. The Prime Minister from the beginning was agreeable to the idea of reorganisation of the hilly areas. But due to pressure from the leaders of Assam Congress he did not concede the demand of a full-fledged Hill State and proposed the Scottish Pattern of Administration. Shri Nehru also agreed to appoint a Commission to report on the proposals of administrative changes and consequent modification in the VIth Schedule. The leaders from the hills naturally rejected these proposals.

It must be remembered here that the leaders from the hills have been very patiently and peacefully trying to persuade the Union Government regarding the legitimacy of their demand. They met the Prime Minister and the Home Minister several times during 1960 and 1964. Finally Shri Nehru persuaded the leaders from the hills for the appointment of the Commission on the basis of giving the people from the hills "largest autonomy within the State of Assam." Accordingly the Pataskar Commission was appointed in 1965. The Commission found that there is considerable reaction in the hilly areas due to severe economic difficulties, slow progress in regard to such pressing needs as communications, road coverage etc. The Commission made special reference to the vast disparity in respect of Central Grants as compared to the neighbouring territories like NEFA, Nagaland etc. During the Third Five Year Plan the per capita allocation under Article 275 schemes in Nagaland, NEFA and Assam Hills were Rs. 407.8, Rs. 212.9 and Rs. 69.9 respectively. This glaring disparity has further strengthened the demand of the people from the hills for separation from Assam.

Although the Government of India has not taken any decision on the recommendation of the Pataskar Commission, on 27th December 1966 the Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi declared in Shillong that there would be some suitable reorganisation of the State consistent with essential links at the top. Subsequently the Prime Minister and the Home Minister had detailed discussion with the leaders of the A.P.H.L.C. following which the Home Ministry issued a communique on 13th January

1967 indicating the Government's proposal that a federal structure composed of federating units not subordinate to one another should provide the basis for reorganisation of Assam. This scheme popularly known as the Federal Scheme was accepted by the leaders of the hills, but the Assam Congress opposed this scheme. Mr. Chaliha spared no pains to show that there was widespread opposition to this scheme. He chartered a special plane and took some thirty legislators belonging to different parties to Delhi to oppose this scheme. The Government of India awed by this demonstration appointed another Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri Ashok Mehta for further consideration of this problem of reorganisation of Assam.

The Ashok Mehta Committee's endeavours were bound to be futile since the All Party Hill Leaders boycotted this Committee from the very beginning. This Committee rejected the federal basis of reorganisation as suggested in the Home Ministry Communiqué of 13th January 1967. They only added a few more subjects to the VIth Schedule and the district councils were designated as 'legislatures of autonomous areas'. But according to Mehta Committee every bill passed by this legislature was to be submitted to the Governor of Assam who would give his assent on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam. This provision was a complete negation of whatever autonomy was supposed to have been given to the "autonomous areas". Naturally the A.P.H.L.C. rejected the Mehta Committee proposal and insisted on a federal type of reorganisation.

This situation created a deadlock in the reorganisation problem. The refusal on the part of Mr. Chaliha to consider the federal proposal in the name of national unity and integration only produced contrary results.

It is well known that unity cannot be preserved by imposition. On the contrary real unity can be realised only by conceding the legitimate demands of different groups of people. The more one tries to curb the local aspirations, the more extreme form they take. Thus the refusal to give a Hill State or consider federal set-up for Assam has driven the various local groups to take to extreme positions. Thus a section of Mizo extremists have taken to armed revolt under Mr. Laldersa and like the hostile Nagas demanded a sovereign Mizo State. In the plains the various tribal communities like the Miries and the backward sections like the Ahoms also demanded more and real autonomy.

It is a very sad commentary on the twenty-year career of the Congress Government in Assam that they have failed to win over a single backward section in the State. Assam's land is fertile and the State is rich with natural resources. Yet increase in agricultural production or in the tempo of industrial development is almost nill. Not a single new industry has come up during the last ten years. Tea gardens and oil exploration, the only industries worth the name — were set up during the British regime. The Assamese are not given to hard labour and have little wherewithal or know-how for trade or commerce. Naturally the vast majority of the tea-garden labour comes from Bihar, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and most of the trade is carried out by Bengalis and Rajasthani traders. The educated section from the high-castes in Assam was till now absorbed in services and education. But with the spread of education among the tribes and the backward sections, the youngsters among them are being frustrated in the absence of proper avenues of employment. The Assamese, both from the hills and the plains, have artistic fingers and they need to be provided with skilled jobs, such as watch manufacturing. An industrialist suggested that if the Government of Assam could persuade the Union Government to locate a telephon industry and watch and fountain pen manufacturing industry in Assam, the problem of suitable employment could be eased. He thought that in the matter of watch manufacturing Assam could easily compete with Switzerland. Silk processing, fine textiles and petro-chemicals would also help Assam to develop properly. But utter neglect on the part of State Government and undue pressures from some high-ups have stagnated the economy of Assam resulting in the present mood of frustration and separatism.

The younger section among the different communities in Assam have come to believe that they have no future, in the present set-up. The Ahoms living in the upper Assam districts of Lachimpur and Sibsagar are a backward community. These people belonged to the Tai-Mongolian race and could be considered to be more Assamese than the Chaliha clique. The Ahoms founded their kingdom in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 A.D. The Ahom kings reigned over Assam for over 600 years and adopted Hinduism as their religion. Lachit was one of the bravest Generals of these kings who fought the Moghuls

and did not allow them to conquer Assam. The Ahom community comprises of more than 50 per cent of the population of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts (nearly 15 lakhs) and have a proud record of history, culture and literature. But these people find themselves neglected and bypassed by the present rulers of Assam. During the last twenty years not a single leader from the Ahom community has found a place as a cabinet rank minister either at the State level or at the Centre. Further, in each renewed delimitation of constituencies in the Ahom populated areas, the delimitations have been so manipulated as to reduce the Ahoms, who had participated in the freedom movement by court-
ing imprisonment and facing the gallows, had cherished high hopes that they would secure political and social justice as equal and respectable partners. But these hopes have been belied and they, therefore, want a separate state in this region. The Ahom-Tai-Mongoloid Rajya Parishad is working for this ideal. It is difficult to say how much following they enjoy among the community. But we met four young and educated representatives of this organisation. They were quite sharp and reasonable and we felt that they are commanding good following at least among the young and educated sections of their community. Although they demand a separate state, they expressed their readiness to accept some sort of autonomous status in a federal set-up of Assam. We feel this to be legitimate and needs to be given serious and sympathetic consideration.

Besides the Ahoms the Tribals from the plains of Assam are also not happy with the present set-up. There are nine different types of tribal people living in different parts of Brahmaputra valley totalling about 10 lakhs, i.e. about 9.06 per cent of the total population of Assam. But these people are spread over the State and have no contiguous area. These tribals can be divided into two main groups: the Bodo group and the Miri group. Both come from the Mongolian origin; they speak different dialects of which Bodo is a developed one. The Bodos are the earliest known inhabitants of Assam. Even the name Assam owes its origin to the Bodo language. When the Ahoms invaded Assam in the thirteenth century, there were many Bodo kingdoms in Assam. When the Ahoms established their kingdom after defeating the Bodos, the latter called it Ha-Sham, meaning the land of the Shamo, i.e. the Thai people. As the Ahom

kingdom extended over the whole Brahmaputra valley, the name Assam applied to the whole area. The Bodo group of tribes live mainly in certain concentrated areas of lower Assam in the Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang districts. The Miri group, originally belonging to the hill tribes, has settled in the northern part of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts. Some Bodo-Kacharies live in Mikir hills and Kachar district. The tribals from the plain neither enjoy the benefits of the Vth Schedule or the VIth Schedule; they are actually on the same footing as the Scheduled Castes.

The tribals from the plains are essentially cultivators and land is, therefore, of supreme importance to them. But large number of immigrants from East Bengal started to pour into the tribal areas from the beginning of the century. Apart from Bengal immigrants, local non-tribal people, money-lenders and traders have been onslaughting the lands belonging to the tribals. The Tribal League, a representative organisation of the tribal people worked hard to stop this onslaught. In 1938, they entered into an agreement with the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. The agreement demarcated areas occupied by tribals by imaginary lines and debarred the immigrants and other non-tribals from settling in areas inside the tribal line. The Muslim League during the time of their ministry in 1939-40 also agreed to abide by this 'line system'. In 1946 when the Congress was again returned to power the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation were modified to give legal effect to the 'line system' and consequently the Tribal Belts and Blocks were constituted. There are in all 33 such belts consisting of 10,973,673 bighas of land in which non-tribals are not supposed to settle. But the bitter experience of the last twenty years has convinced the tribals that the Assam Government is not interested in giving adequate protection to the tribal land. It has deliberately rehabilitated refugees from East Pakistan in Tribal Belts and Blocks in gross violation of the provisions of the Act. It is also alleged that Shri Chaliha is encouraging Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan to come and settle in these belts so that his political support in these areas is assured.

Apart from encroachment on their lands, the tribals have a number of complaints against the rulers of Assam. A serious complaint refers to non-utilisation and diversion of money allotted

under Article 275 of the Constitution. In the second Five Year Plan a sum of Rs. 12.5 lakhs allotted under this provision of Article 275 was given to Gauhati University to set up a Tribal Culture Research Institute. In the matter of employment, delimitation of reserved constituencies and such other things the tribals are facing so many difficulties that a feeling of separatism is taking roots among them. Some of them are, therefore, demanding a separate state of their own. We however, feel that this is neither feasible nor desirable, but we suggest that special statutory provisions for safeguarding their land, rights and for the development of their belts will have to be made in the reorganised set-up of Assam.

Assam is today faced with two opposing tendencies likely to clash with one another on a big scale. On the one hand there is the **status quo** section headed by the Pradesh Congress. On the other there are different backward groups aspiring for a new status. The APHLC demand a separate Hill State and say they will not be satisfied with anything short of that. Then there is the demand for a Ahom State. The Miries of Lakhimpur and Abhor foothills are clamouring for a Miriland, the Rajabanshis led by the Raja Ajit Narain Deb want a State of Kamtapur consisting of certain areas of Cooch-Bihar and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal and the Goalpara district of Assam. It is true that these movements are like pimples on the political face of Assam. But their potential for dangerous consequences cannot be underrated, because all these movements are today nourishing some type of volunteer organisation which are likely to go out of control of the present leadership. The All-Party Hill Leaders Conference has organised a highly disciplined para-military organisation known as the NVDA (Non Violent Direct Action Volunteers). They are estimated to be 20,000 strong and recently they staged a rehearsal direct action in Shillong in which more than 1000 young boys and girls are reported to have participated. Then there is the Lachit Vahini organised by the Ahoms as apart from the secret Lachit Sena in Kampur District. Another group known as Mukti Jeejaru (Liberation Fighters) are secretly distributing secessionist leaflets in Sibsagar District. In Gauhati Dr. A. Barthalour has organised what is known as the Assam Parishad. This is an organisation of about 400-500 Assamese youth and students whose aim, declared aim, is to find cultural,

economic and social solutions to Assam's political problem. Much of Assam for Assamese propaganda is attributed to these fellows. Then there is the much talked of Lachit Sena. This is a secret organisation which distributes posters and leaflets calling on non-Assamese to leave Assam. Anonymous letters are sent to Marwari traders in the name of this Lachit Sena threatening them with dire consequences if they do not leave Assam. This campaign was carried on for nearly a year prior to the ugly incidents of 26th January in Gauhati. It is really curious that none of the police and intelligence agencies of either State Government or the Central Government have been able to unearth the secret functioning of this Sena. There is a strong rumour in Assam that this Lachit Sena is a shrewd manoeuvre of the ruling clique with a double purpose. Since Lachit was a Ahom General, such antinational and anti-social activities carried on in his name would discredit the Ahom Thai-Mongoloid Parishad and their demand. The Parishad have, however, by a resolution of their State Council on 3-2-1968 disowned the Lachit Sena and have called upon its followers now not to join it. Secondly, the ruling clique wants to misdirect the discontent among the Assamese people in general and the youth in particular against the non-Assamese. The allegation that the ruling clique is conniving at the activities of the Lachit Sena has been further strengthened by the fact that even after arresting nearly 1400 persons in connection with the Gauhati Disturbances, the Lachit Sena continues its activities of threatening many Marwari traders by anonymous letters.

Underlying these tendencies is the economic failure of the Assam Government. At the time of our Independence, Assam had one of the highest per capita income in the Indian Union. The State was surplus in food. But with the beginning of the Five Year Plans a large number of migrants from other States began to flood the State in search of jobs and investment opportunities. At first the easy-going Assamese did not care. But during decade of 1951 to 1961 the population of Assam increased by 34.4 per cent as against 21.5 per cent increase in the country as a whole. This difference was due to the arrival of Muslim infiltrators from East Pakistan and job-seekers from the rest of the country. With the consequent pressure on food supplies, land and avenues of employment, different tensions arose between

Assamese and non-Assamese, the tribals and the non-tribals, the people from the hills and the plains and so on.

During the Plan periods the State Government spent a greater amount of their funds in non-productive activities rather than in productive schemes. As a result the emergence of an army of educated young men, angry and frustrated has become a problem. It has been further accentuated by the State Government's inability to stop immigration. As a number of Congressmen depend on the immigrant vote for their success the administration is prevented from taking effective steps even when it has the moral sanction to do so as in the case of illegal infiltration from East Pakistan. It may be remembered here that Mr. Chaliha who was defeated in 1957 in his home constituency was later returned to the Assembly from a Muslim majority area.

Such is the explosive situation in Assam which has become further dangerous because of its border situation. The Chinese on the one hand and the Pakistanis on the other are trying to exploit the present tensions in Assam. The extreme wing of the Left Communist Party is also active with the help of Naga hostiles. The recent unearthing of a subversive plot in Jorhat in which the members of CPM and Naga underground are involved is a very serious pointer. But unfortunately neither the Government of India nor the rulers in Assam seem to realise these dangers. They are still worried about their own power positions and offices. The Republican Day ugly incidents in Gauhati can be traced to these power-seeking mechanisms. When the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi saw that the Hill leaders were not agreeable to the Ashok Mehta Committee Plan, she made a statement on 28th December 1967 expressing India Government's inability to implement this Plan. Mr. Chaliha and his friends seem to have gone wild over this statement. He, therefore, set to teach a lesson to Mrs. Gandhi. There are definite proofs to show that most of the demonstrations to protest against reorganisation that took place in Assam in January 1968 were directly or indirectly inspired by the ruling clique. In this the rulers wanted to misdirect the whole wrath of the angry and frustrated youngsters against the Union Government which later degenerated into an anti-Indian feeling. Thus on 13th January 1968, the first anniversary of the Home Ministry's communique suggesting a federal set-up, the students mainly

hailing from the plains staged an anti-reorganisation demonstration. Then on the 24th January they gave a call for all-Assam strike. We have been authoritatively told by responsible persons that Mr. Chaliha sent telegrams to over 500 headmasters to attend a meeting at Sibsagar where on the 20th January, it is alleged that the plan for 24th January general strike was hatched in this meeting. The violent outbursts on 26th January against the Marwaris in Gauhati in which the National Flag was dis-honoured was only the culmination of Chaliha's efforts to show to the Central leaders that any talk of reorganisation of Assam would set the state ablaze.

The conspicuous absence of Shri Chaliha from Gauhati on 26th January, the refusal of the police to take any action against the anti-social elements, are indeed very telling facts. We were told that professional and technical skill was displayed in the matter of opening up of steel lockers and burning of trucks. Complex chemicals have been used in this behalf. This suggests that the plot must have been cooked earlier and the police were either unaware or complacent. Further, although the wrath of the people was aimed at non-Assamese immigrant Muslims were significantly spared. If a building in which a non-Assamese was carrying on business belonged to a Muslim the building was spared and only the goods were brought on the street and set on fire. In other cases buildings were also burnt to ashes. This shows that there was a method in the madness that erupted in Gauhati on the Republican Day. Shri Chaliha and his clique want to take advantage of this situation to frighten the Central leaders and hope to maintain the status quo. Any effort to radically alter the present set-up, he argues, will let loose unprecedented disintegrating forces and therefore pleads for the status quo in the name of National unity and integration. But past experience in Nagaland has shown that efforts to maintain status quo by the use of force only help to strengthen anti-national and separatist tendencies. Thus the refusal to constitute a separate Hill State has only resulted in strengthening the Mizo Liberation Front. Opposition of the Mizos for a Hill State has not strengthened the hands of those who want to keep United Assam but has resulted in helping Mr. Lalderga to successfully exploit the popular discontent for his armed revolt. It is apprehended that if the demand for Hill State is not conceded in time the NVDA

volunteers also may go the Mizo way. If the present conflict among the ruling clique for United Assam and those who want a more democratic and federal reorganisation of the State is not settled in a just way, there is every danger that Assam may be turned into another Vietnam. The Chinese and Pakistanis are only eagerly waiting for such a situation to develope.

Those who are really interested in the integrity and security of this area must, therfore, take a fresh look at the whole situation. It need not be emphasised that border cannot be defended by armies alone. A satisfied and contended population residing in the border areas has much better safety value. With this in view the democratic reorganisation of Assam becomes highly imminent. Utter neglect on the part of our rulers—both central and local—of the undeveloped regions and under-privileged sections of these areas have resulted in the accumulation of massive discontent. This discontent occasionally erupts in anarchical fashion. The need of the hour, therefore, is to realise and understand the basic urges and legitimate demands of the people and to find out proper solutions for them. As the proverb goes a stitch in time saves nine. If that is not done we shall have to face disintegration and chaos. Chinese and Pakistanis are trying to erode our society from within. They are using our angry and discontented people as their agents to create chaos and thereby hamper our progress. A courageous and determined lead alone can save the situation. Any piecemeal or halting approach will only worsen it. It seems the present ruling section in Assam are interested only in sticking to power and are opposed to any change in the name of national integrity. But real integration will come only if the people are contented. The economic and political aspirations of the people of this area, therefore, must be very sympathetically considered. The problem of acute unemployment among the young educated people, hunger for land among the landless sections in the villages, the political aspirations of the people from the hills and other backward classes must be considered without any prejudice. The details of such a step can be worked out in consultations with the people concerned. It must be remembered that this is a very strategic region sandwitched between China and Pakistan and its defence needs are of highest priority. But these frontiers as has been said above can be safeguarded only if the people living in the

frontier area are kept contended. The lust for power of the ruling clique must not be allowed to come in the way. Those people are so power-thirsty that they would rather prefer a military rule than hand over legitimate power to the tribals and the backward. The speech of the Assam Congress leader advocating a military rule or suggestions made by big business papers like the **Times of India** for a Five Year President's rule are all indications of this lust. They must know that such outdated devices cannot curb popular aspirations. The All-Party Hill Leaders Conference has now threatened to resort to peaceful direct action, if their demand, is not conceded. This direct action may degenerate into violence and connections with our enemy. It is true that the present APHLC leaders' loyalty to the country is beyond doubt, but no one can guarantee that the situation will remain under their control once the movement gets into action. The Government of India, therefore, must immediately take a bold and courageous stand and bring about a proper democratic reorganisation of this area before it is too late.

NEFA also must find its proper place in this reorganisation. We cannot forget the sad memories of 1962 when our armies had to face a shameful surrender in this area. Six long years have passed yet nothing tangible seems to have been done here. There are no proper road communications, no developmental activities. We met a number of young students from NEFA studying in Gauhati. They demand that Hindi should be made compulsory in their schools. But unfortunately our Government has not taken any concrete steps in this direction. It is because the NEFA administration is being run by the fancy of some high officials. One would be surprised to note that NEFA areas are being administered from Shillong which is nearly 400 miles from the area. How can these officers keep contact with the people in NEFA, understand their problems and difficulties and take proper measures for their development. This is only a pointer to the indifference of our Government. We were told that the Chinese are trying to contact some of the tribal chiefs in NEFA who were taken to China and offered great hospitality and huge presents. Government of India's officials reacted to this trick only by inviting tribal chiefs to New Delhi and offering them fatter presents. This is not the way to enhance a spirit of national consciousness among the most vital section of our frontier

people. They need to be properly educated and their difficulties deserve our utmost attention. We were sorry to note that out of only 34 graduates of this area, nearly a dozen still remain unemployed. These young men could have been easily employed and their energies very effectively utilised if the NEFA administration was located somewhere inside the territory. The easy going and comfort loving attitude of our officials in the administration has become a great hindrance in properly handling a very delicate situation in this strategic area. The NEFA administration, therefore, need to be immediately democratised.

CHAPTER 8

CAN WE BUILD AN ALTERNATIVE ?

THE SIGNIFICANCE of the mid-term elections could be appreciated properly only in the context of the prevailing turmoil in the country. The entire sub-continent is passing through a stage of political and social transition. The outcome of the last General Elections was merely an indication of dissatisfaction and the discontent of the masses in general. In a way it was a notice served on all the political parties, especially the Congress who has been ruling the country for over 20 years. The voters gave a timely warning that they must think seriously and give justice through the democratic processes guaranteed under the constitution. Unfortunately, the meaning and the significance of this warning is not being adequately appreciated by those who are supposed to guide the people in their political thinking and actions. Quite a number of them feel bewildered and shocked by the instability that comes in the wake of the Fourth General Elections. Congress Party is adroitly using this psychological fright to their advantage. They are trying to tell the people that if they do not vote for the Congress, there will be increasing instability leading to an anarchical situation. They want the people to forget that the present situation emerged in spite of their being continuously in power all these years. Even in states, where Congress was returned with a majority, there were large scale defections resulting in heterogeneous coalitions. The leadership of the Congress would like the people to forget that the present situation was the outcome of their policies and programmes.

Under existing circumstances it should be realised that the instability will continue until the causes of the instability are identified and suitable programme and policy evolved for their speedy removal. Economic hardships, social inequality, disputes over the issue of language and unequal development of various regions are the four main causes of the present discontent. Twenty years of freedom and the three economic plans have created a

new environment in the country. It is true that the gross national income has increased considerably. But it has been achieved at a very high cost. It is the masses who have paid for this in the shape of heavy indirect taxes and rising prices. The rulers have failed to keep the prices of essential commodities in check. Consequently, those who have fixed incomes—such as workers, small farmers and agricultural labourers, continue to suffer increasing hardships. They have to pay higher prices for essential commodities and at the month end they are out of pocket. Most of them have to incur debts to balance their family budgets.

The number of young men and women receiving education has considerably increased but the employment opportunities have not increased proportionately. Unemployment figures are growing like a snowball. It is no wonder, therefore, that tensions between the affluent class of well-to-do people and the masses undergoing hardships is continually increasing. The discontent is mounting and it manifests itself in strikes, hunger strikes, satyagraha, student discontent, communal riots and so on.

In the social field, the backward classes, who form the majority, have always suffered injustice at the hands of the upper castes. It was their fond hope that after freedom there would be a change for the better. The change has come about, by and large, in the states who are south of the Narmada. The monopoly of power and prestige enjoyed by the upper castes no longer exists in these states. In the North, however, the upper castes continue to stick to power and social justice is denied to the backward classes. They continue to suffer as before. Equality of opportunity, guaranteed under the constitution, is denied in practice. The backward classes do not get a chance to go up in spite of the fact that many of them are quite capable sometimes more capable than the rest. It should be noted that the malady of large scale defections is essentially affecting the North. This phenomenon could only be explained and understood on the background of continued upper castes domination even after the achievement of Independence. It is uncharitable and unjust to suggest that some of the leaders who have defected from the Congress have done so for their individual selfish ends or for lust of power. It must be realised that there are compelling social forces behind this trend. Late Dr. Lohia could appreciate

this factor and therefore the Socialist Party decided to give sixty per cent seats of power to the backward classes.

In the South, the factor that is causing disturbance and the instability is the dispute over the language. Even there the intensity varies according to the social forces operating behind the movement. The riots caused by the demand of the Osmania University students for a separate Telangana state would serve as an illustration of the discontent due to unequal development.

In the Fourth General Elections, the voters refused to vote for the Congress and the Congress lost its grip over the situation. They voted out the Congress but there was no alternative party who could take its place and form a government. Naturally, the opposition parties were compelled to come together and provide an alternative in the form a coalition ministry. If the opposition parties were not to do so, the voters would have been deprived of their right under the Constitution, to have a democratic administration of their choice. The coalition ministries, however, could serve only as a stop-gap arrangement in the absence of a party or a group of parties who could represent the discontent of the masses and give them relief through suitable executive and legislative actions. The fact that the coalition governments could do very little in the short span that was available to them is not surprising. Admittedly it was a coalition of heterogeneous group with basic differences. On the top of it, the Congress planned and carried out its designs to displace them as early as possible in the hope that the masses will put them in the office once again. The mid-term elections are therefore not something that was unexpected. Opportunism and the greed to get back in power on the part of the Congress brought them little too early. There is, therefore, no need to be panicky or alarmist.

The monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress was ended by the last General Elections in a number of states. New forces have been released in the process and the voters have now realised that the Congress is not indispensable. It was the late Dr. Lohia who, with his unique foresight, could visualise, much before others could do, the inevitable failure of the Congress. He therefore gave a new orientation to the policy of the Socialist Party and urged upon the opposition parties to avoid division of votes by adjustment of seats amongst themselves. This was

necessary because the Congress governments were minority governments—a cause of instability and imbalances. They could secure even less than forty per cent votes. He further suggested to the coalition ministries not to fight amongst themselves on basic issues but to pick up a few items of programme that would give relief to the masses. He could see that this would start a process of realignment of political forces. His advice, however, was not adequately heeded. The Congress, therefore, succeeded in its designs and the coalition ministries were toppled.

It was essential for the opposition parties to evolve a new strategy to meet the mid-term poll challenge. A concerted move to keep the Congress out of power was imperative. Imbalances and instability are inherent in the situation and putting the Congress back in power is no solution. S. S. P. therefore reiterates its policy to have adjustments with all the opposition parties. Such a step would have served the cause of democracy in the present circumstances despite the basic differences among these parties. A government backed only by a minority vote is bound to cause instability and imbalances. The adjustments however, were not enough to meet the requirement of the situation. The second step should be for the like minded parties of the opposition to bring about a programmatic consolidation. Without being doctrinaire they should select some important items and promise a time-bound implementation. The first part of the strategy, namely adjustment of seats amongst all opposition parties was not acceptable to the other parties. But as far as the second is concerned, it has been attempted with a considerable measure of success in Bihar. Three parties, S. S. P., P. S. P. and L.C.D. (Loktantric Congress Dal) have come together to provide an alternative to the Congress. This coalition is more homogeneous than the last one. It would have been better if the C. P. I. were also able to see its way to come nearer. Ten months of the United Front Government was too short a time to make a deep impact on the people. Congress is naturally trying to cash on this point. But they are not going to succeed in their efforts to mislead the electorates. The United Front, therefore, has a fair chance to come back to power with a comfortable majority. After coming to power if they make use of the democratic processes to give the much needed relief to the masses, they could succeed in checking the adventurism of the Naxalites. But if

they fail to act with speed and vigour, a new situation detrimental to the growth of democracy would arise. The S. S. P. is a small partner in the United Front. But it would insist with whatever strength it possesses upon the implementation of this policy and would try to create the necessary public opinion and mass pressure to give shape and form to the urgent demands of the toiling masses.

The instability, according to the S. S. P. is inherent in the situation and therefore we are not unduly worried about it. An alternative to the Congress does not fall from the heavens. It cannot be imported either from other countries. It has to grow from the soil. In the given situation, no single party can hope to provide such an alternative. Only a group of parties, working on the lines suggested above, can help the process of polarisation and help democracy to take root. It should be remembered that our first lessons and experiences in democratic government was in the field of local self institutes during the British days. Therefore, it is good in a way that the people of India are being asked to develop an alternative to the Congress in the States. Very likely a situation very similar to that after the Fourth General Elections might be created even at the centre. The opposition parties, therefore, must avail of the opportunity given to them and prepare for the eventuality when the Congress fails to have absolute majority in the Parliament. We are quite hopeful of the future provided the process of rethinking starts from here and now. Experience gained during the coalition in the states should provide guidelines for the future. We have faith in the democratic vitality of the Indian people and, therefore, have no doubt that they will compel the political parties to rethink and give a new orientation to their policies. No political party can refuse to adjust itself to the changing situation.

CHAPTER 9

THE WAY TO SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

THERE IS a growing realisation in the country today that the Congress cannot go on ruling this country perpetually. The people now seem to have reconciled to this development but they do not know who will take the place of the Congress. What is the alternative to the Congress, they ask. Behind that query is a vague fear that there is no other single party which could replace the Congress and carry on the administration of the country in a manner that would give political stability with rapid economic growth. How can we overcome this difficulty ?

Several solutions are suggested, but they do not seem to go to the root of the problem. One of the proposals is that of a national government. Obviously with the clash of ideologies prevalent in the political area, one diametrically opposite of the other, this proposal is not feasible. Then there is a suggestion of a government by the talented people. But who is to choose those talented men and whether the country is prepared to abide by their decrees ? These suggestions, howsoever pleasing to the mind, are not practical and one comes back to the original problem—namely the alternative to the Congress.

Presently there is a talk going on about a coalition ministry in the centre. But on analysis, it will be clear that such a coalition, while it may help the process of polarisation, may not give stability with rapid economic growth. If parties who are eager to have a fundamental change will clash with them again instability and imbalance would result.

For a real answer to these problems one must go to the root of the situation. For 20 years the Congress did give a stable government to the people of India. However, they have not been able to record a speedy development in the direction of a new structure of an egalitarian society. At the same time the socialists who from the very beginning have been articulate in their demand for basic change in the structure of our society

have not been able as yet to make an impact on the situation. Mahatma Gandhi also called himself an ideal socialist. But for quite some time he was in favour of the **Varnashram** system although he was against untouchability. At the fag end of his life, however, he realised that if we want a really socialistic reconstruction on the basis of equality, even **Varnashram** system has to be given up. When he staked his life for the removal of untouchability, many of us did not realise the significance of his decision to undertake a fast unto death against separate electorates for the Harijans. For a long time the Indian socialists failed to realise the real nature of the task that they were called upon to perform. In this country, social inequality born out of the **Varnashram** and the caste system with its ghastly appendage of untouchability was a greater challenge to the socialists than economic inequality and exploitations. It must also be realised that even the problem of Hindu-Muslim discord accentuated by the die-hard nature of our Hindu structure based on **Varnashram** and caste. Indeed one may go even a step further and say that the down-trodden masses would not have embraced Islam in such a big number if the Hindu structure of the society was more accommodative and just. In this context one can understand the significance of Dr. Ambedkar embracing Budhism. He was convinced that he could not get justice within the Hindu fold. Therefore, the task of the Indian socialists is very much different and difficult from the task which the Western socialists were called upon to accomplish. They had to fight only against economic inequality, whereas we have to fight both economic inequality and social inequality based on birth.

Mahatma Gandhi, it seems, did realise the magnitude of the task we were to accomplish and therefore he used to say that he was the ideal socialist. He was not against learning from the Western thought, but according to him mere imitation was of no avail. He also inculcated amongst us the spirit of Swadeshi. He insisted on Swadeshi not only in the matter of goods but also in regard to the means and the organs with which we have to reconstruct our society. His emphasis was that the efforts of the Indian people would mainly bring about the reconstruction of our society. Consequently, he gave us his constructive and combative programme, with which he mobilised the masses for the struggle for Independence. But at the end of his life, the

Congress leaders accepted partition of the country as an easy way for power. The socialists thought that this would retard the revolution. They, therefore, came out of the Congress in order to complete the unfinished revolution. The rightist leadership of the Congress used the power to maintain and strengthen the status quo forces. The socialists also wanted to capture power and use it for a revolutionary change. The masses, however, did not react to their programme and they were rejected by the electorate. As a matter of fact the socialists should have given more attention to their task of constructive and combative programme of organising and mobilising the people. But gradually they shifted their emphasis to parliamentary activity which became more and more important to them. Dr. Lohia, it must be said, could see the danger in this drift. Was it really possible to bring about a fundamental change through the existing power structure? He laid emphasis on the resistance movement and tried to develop his party independently of the Communists and the communalists and in opposition to the Congress. The Congress, instead of ruling the country in a clean and honest way, became the victim of corruptive influences and used all sort of means to maintain its grip on power. Under such circumstances, it became difficult to build up an independent socialist alternative. Dr. Lohia, therefore, decided to oust the Congress by having adjustments with all the parties in the opposition. This policy came to be known as non-Congressism. His objective was to smash the monopoly of the Congress which they enjoyed for twenty years and which were stifling the forces of revolutionary change. Today we see that the monopoly of the Congress is considerably shaken and the revolutionary energies of the people are getting unleashed. It is for the socialists to make a supreme effort to channellise these forces under the flag of socialism and give a real alternative focus to the people.

The socialist movement is at the cross-roads today. Much depends on which turn they are going to take. Do they want to work in the given power structure? Unknowingly they seem to drift towards this point of view. Our obsession for election to Parliament and legislatures makes it inevitable for us to work through the existing power structure and social framework. This approach could be effective only in case we are prepared to align ourselves with the so-called progressive forces

in the country, which means the conventional United Fronts with the Communists and similar other parties. I am doubtful whether they would help us achieve our objective. If we believe that we will have to bring about a socialist revolution with democratic means and organs thrown up during our struggle, we will have to make a historic decision as to how much importance we give to the present power apparatus. Our party today is obviously oriented towards a capture of power in the present apparatus. Consequently, our emphasis is shifted from mass work to electioneering and we are more interested in seats and legislative work. Thus, if we decide to function in the present social and political structure, instead of attacking the caste system, we shall be tempted to compromise with casteism with a view to win their votes. This goes counter to our main objective of destroying this traditional structure. It is high time we come to a decision on this fundamental issue. Even if we take this belated decision today, we must realise that our party workers are not in that frame of mind. In the early twenties, a great debate took place in the national movement as to whether non-cooperation should continue or there should be a change in the policy. There was a very strong wing in the Congress pitted against Mahatma Gandhi, who wanted to use the legislatures for conducting the national movement. Gandhiji wanted to continue with his constructive and combative programme. But he realised that a majority of the leaders, if not the workers, were in favour of the parliamentary programme. He observed that the parliamentary mentality had come to stay. The national movement was thus divided into two wings—changers and non-changers. He allowed the changers to fight the elections and go to the legislatures. For this purpose, Swaraj Party was formed as a wing of the Congress. The parliamentary programme, however, came to the end of its tether by 1929-30, when the Congress adopted 'Complete Independence' as its goal and decided to launch a civil disobedience movement for its achievement. Today, a similar situation obtains in the socialist movement. Are we going to emphasise on class struggle and mass mobilisation or are we going to allow ourselves to be engulfed in mere parliamentary work and elections? No amount of arguments will help us take a definite decision or bring us any conviction. The only course open for those who believe in mass work is to

plunge in it with a bang without wasting their time in fruitless discussion and arguments. It must be realised that even a parliamentary majority or a change in the government will not be of much use unless we forge popular sanctions outside the legislatures. Similarly, those who emphasise on parliamentary activity should also realise that in that case they will not be able to go on with their accent on non-Congressism also. For without emphasis on mass work, if the Congress is reduced to a minority by the weight of its own unpopularity and opposition adjustments, it may be that a good chunk of Congressmen may join the leftist forces along with some influential leaders who may assume the leadership of the united front as in the case of some non-Congress governments in the states. But if the Congress is thrown out as a result of a strong popular movement, it will have in the process thrown up its own leadership which will be much more capable and effective than any of the so-called progressive Congress leaders. This is only an essay in peeping into the future. Whatever that may be those who are serious about socialist reconstruction of society and the destruction of the existing unjust social and economic order, must now take courage in both their hands and go to the masses.

In going to the masses, the socialist movement has to make up its mind as to what levers they are going to utilise with a view to destroying the old outmoded order and replacing it with a new one, where the outcastes in the present power structure will get their legitimate share. A new situation has arisen today as a result of the economic and educational changes that have come about in the last twenty years.

While in a majority of states the old high castes, generally entrenched in the rural areas, continue to hold their position in the power apparatus, some states witness a new middle class coming up in the urban areas trying to replace the rural aristocracy. This is the result of a growing imbalance in economic developments and political consciousness in different parts of the country. At the centre, the capitalists and especially the monopolists are strengthening their grip. Thus, both at the centre and in the states and also in the local bodies, the toiling masses and the down-trodden people are excluded from positions of power.

In villages the socially oppressed low castes as well as the agricultural labourers continue to remain outside of the power

structure. Not only that, but the new dominant class is in a better position to suppress them than before due to accession of political and economic power. Unless this rural proletariat which mainly comprises of the insecure tenant and the landless labourers and who happen to belong mostly to the backward, Harijan and Adivasi communities, are organised to fight against economic and social injustice, they will continue to suffer. It will be our task, therefore, to mobilise these people who are the most exploited and who are really interested in pulling down the old order. If we want a real change in the structure, we will have to mobilise those who are interested in such a change. The socialist movement therefore, must give a programme of action which might be named as **substance of socialist alternative**.

I think a really alternative force can be organised if socialists in the country try to mobilise and organise the masses on the following points :—

1. Security of tenure to the tenant with reasonable rent to the land owner.
2. Proper wages to the landless labourers and justice to the crop-sharers.
3. Fixing of a smaller ceiling on the land and cancelling all benami transfers and distributing of surplus land thus acquired among the landless and the smaller peasants.
4. Provision of technical know-how and other necessities to the smaller peasantry with a view to increase their yield.
5. Resistance to the social injustice perpetrated on the lower castes with a view to ultimately abolish the caste system.
6. A need-based minimum wage to all urban industrial workers and defence of their trade union rights.
7. Appointment of permanent anti-corruption tribunals and developing necessary mass pressures to make their functioning effective and expeditious.
8. Optimum utilisation of manpower in the countryside with a view to increasing national income and developing agricultural land.

9. Ban on any transfer of urban land between individuals and fixing a ceiling of housing space for every individual family.

In order to effectively mobilise the masses on these points the socialists will have to do some rethinking in the manner of their working and organisation. At present whenever there is a movement against a particular injustice, it remains restricted to the section concerned and does not evoke any response among other sections of the down-trodden people. Socialists, therefore, will have to forge a link between the urban and the rural proletariat. They have to attack the two evils of economic exploitation and social oppression. These two evils are the twin pillars on which the present set-up stands. The attack on them, therefore, need to be simultaneous and integrated. Class struggle will be the weapon against economic inequality and cultural struggle will be the weapon against social oppression. Socialists, therefore, must take the initiative in order to develop an integrated movement against economic and social oppression.

This task can be best achieved by setting up of an organisation of young man from rural and urban proletariat and instil in them the need for social revolution. These young men must be prepared to resist oppression and injustice anywhere and everywhere. This organisation, along with its resistance programme should also have a constructive activity. They must help the poor and the down trodden in the city in their various difficulties of health, housing, education etc. In villages, they will help the poor peasants with technical know how with a view to increase their yield.

Socialists, who are today divided in various groups, would give serious thought to these suggestions. If they consider such a mass mobilisation and youth organisation as the main field of their activity, then alone they can succeed in developing a powerful lever which can unsettle the present equilibrium of power apparatus and bring about a revolutionary change both in economic as well as social structure. It is necessary to attempt maximum mobilisation on these points and for that purpose to seek the co-operation of all those who would believe in this programme

and approach, irrespective of their political affiliations. If this is to call attention from the entire nation, and really accomplish a breakthrough, the socialist forces in the country should merge together and give a broad basis and unified approach for such a movement.

* This article was written on the eve of the Jabalpur Conference of the S.S.P. held on 8th-10th May 1969.

CHAPTER 10

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

THE VICTORY of Shri V. V. Giri over the syndicate's candidate in the Presidential election is an event of great significance in the history of independent India. With it the struggle of the masses for a socialist society is entering a new phase. The Congress party is on the verge of a vertical split. If such a split becomes a reality it will bring about a sure change in the situation and a fresh corelation of political forces, in the country. The anti-imperialist toiling people in the country imbibed the idea of an egalitarian society during the freedom movement. They realised that a mere overthrow of the foreign yoke is not enough. Their problems will not be solved unless the struggle acquired a socialist content. Thus, the concept of a new social order, based on social and economic equality, began to take root and the Congress Socialist Party was founded within the Congress organisation in the year 1934. The Socialists endeavoured to intensify the class struggle of the masses as a part of the national movement with a view to making it more militant and powerful. They aspired to transform the freedom movement with one stroke into a socialist movement. The dream, however, did not materialise.

National leaders became very impatient to wield political power as an instrument of progress. They accepted the partition and their attitude towards the Socialists underwent a significant change immediately after getting into power. While they tolerated them during the struggle for freedom, they made no secret of their hostility to the militant socialist ideology of class struggle after the achievement of freedom. Mahatma Gandhi, however, with his foresight, and his complete identification with the toiling millions, did realise that the new age was for the Socialists and socialism. Therefore, he recommended to the working Committee that Acharya Narendra Dev be chosen as the President of the Indian National Congress. Probably he believed that socialist

movement, if allowed to develop within the national organisation, would be able to adjust itself to the Indian environment. The old guard of the Congress, however, vehemently opposed his suggestion under the pretext that it would lead to a split in the Congress and thereby weaken the forces of national integration. They also argued that violence was inherent in the socialist ideology. Mahatma Gandhi, however, knew that violence was inherent in the institution of the state itself and whenever there is a question of capturing state power, the problem of violence crops up inevitably. He had demonstrated through his movement that state power could be captured from the foreign government without resorting to violence. He thought that the toiling people in our country, true to their tradition of freedom movement, might as well be able to capture state power without an armed revolution and utilise it for shaping their destiny according to their needs and in keeping with their genius.

The majority of our Congress leaders did not see eye to eye with Mahatma Gandhi on this point as on many other issues. Even before the death of Bapu, Mr. Morarji Desai, the then Minister of Bombay State, banned a rally of the Rashtra Seva Dal volunteers in Bombay. Rashtra Seva Dal was a youth organisation dedicated to non-communal nationalism and constructive work in the masses. He not only banned the rally, but imposed restrictions on its day to day activities as well. He complained that the R. S. D. was a socialist organisation and that they shouted slogans 'Long Live Revolution' and '9th August Leaders Zindabad'. Evidently it was his apathy for socialism and socialist leaders that was at the root of his hostility to the R. S. D. In vain it was pointed out to him that the R. S. D. was pledged to democratic and peaceful methods. It should be noted that this happened long before the Congress Socialist Party came out of the parent organisation in 1948. The socialist wing of the National movement was compelled to come out when the Congress constitution was amended so as to make the existence of the C. S. P. within the Congress impossible. Hereafter, the socialists began to function as a democratic opposition to the ruling party. Essentially their opposition was on ideological grounds, since the Congress was not prepared to accept the socialist ideology. If the Congress were to accept it, the constitutional difficulty would have been solved and the Socialists would have agreed to the dissolution of

the Congress Socialist Party.

Curiously enough, in the year 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru prevailed upon the Congress leaders to accept the socialist pattern of society as an objective of the Congress party. If he were to show the strength and will to do so in the year 1948, he could have succeeded in retaining the socialist wing within the Congress. His attempt to bring them in after the change in the Congress objective was also half-hearted. Ordinarily such an important change in the objective of the Congress, would have evoked a lot of discussion, since there were quite a number of leaders and their followers who were very much opposed to socialism, but nothing of the kind happened. Probably they thought it would be useful to take the wind out of the socialist party. The timing was very significant. In the context of Shri Asoka Mehta's notorious theory of political compulsions this move, as expected, did create a lot of confusion in the socialist ranks. The controversy regarding the socialist opposition to the the Congress became all the more acute and ultimately caused the split which forced Dr. Lohia to form a rival socialist party. Discouraged by these internal bickerings, Shri Jayaprakash Narain lost interest and left the Party to join the Bhoodan movement. After the third General Elections of 1962, Comrade Asoka Mehta also lost faith in the Socialist Party's capacity to deliver the goods and went over to the Congress along with a number of his friends. Sarvasri Kamraj and Yeshwantrao Chavan assisted him in his efforts to take a bigger chunk from the Party to the Congress. It is really an irony of fate, that we find Shri Asoka Mehta siding with the Syndicate at a time, for whatever reasons, when a process of polarisation in the Congress is aquiring a fresh momentum.

After Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's declaration of socialist faith and its acceptance by the Congress, no serious effort was made to revitalise the Congress organisation by way of ideological training and cadre building so as to make it an effective instrument of social transformation. Barring a small section of conservative die-hards, the country accepted the need for economic planning. The capitalist class was intelligent enough to see the advantage that could be derived from the plan. The so-called socialists, however, did not bother to think as to how planning could help the construction of socialist society. In the absence of a coherent,

clear-cut and well thought out policy, buttressed with an organisation determined to implement it, the organised wing of the capitalist class and the monopolists managed to derive the maximum advantage from the Five Year Plans. They could conveniently wield the state power for the realisation of their aims and objectives. It is no use blaming Birlas and Tatas. In a similar situation, any other group of businessmen, would not have acted differently. If today unemployment is growing, the standard of life of millions of people is being slashed down owing to the rising prices and if the discontent is mounting, the responsibility must squarely be fixed on the Congress government. While the possessing classes were well organised, the socialist movement was in complete disarray and therefore incapable of mobilising the masses in the right direction. The Communists, in line with the policies of the two Communist camps, proved themselves ineffective to meet the exigencies of the situation. In contrast, the traditionalists and the status quoist elements found it easier to organise to their own benefit. In the absence of a broad and progressive national policy, the regional imbalances and political instability became the order of the day. In the Fourth General Elections, the discontent of the masses became manifest and the Congress was dethroned in quite a number of states. Barring two or three states, however, no single party of the opposition was in a position to form a government on its own. In a situation like this, the formation of non-Congress governments became a historic necessity. Evidently, these governments were not homogeneous but there was no other go. These non-Congress governments did not last long. It was hoped that the mid-term poll would give stable governments. But this hope did not materialise. So far as two important states of U.P. and Bihar are concerned, the political situation became all the more unstable. The people are almost ready for a confrontation on a massive scale. But no party at present is strong and organised enough to give a correct and determined lead. On the contrary, regional parties are coming up on the basis of regional demands. The Congress Party was the only All India Party with its branches all over the country. But it is also failed to resolve the deepening contradictions or to afford adequate relief to the masses. The mass discontent began to simmer within the Congress itself. Mere passing of socialist programme resolution was not enough to satisfy the urges of

the people. The demand for its implementation began to be made persistently. This started a process of polarisation within the Congress itself. The rumblings were heard for sometime in the past, but the conflict came into the open during the presidential election. The official Congress candidate, the nominee of the Syndicate, was defeated by the combined strength of the left wing Congressmen and the progressive forces in the opposition. The conservative Syndicate joined hands with the traditionalists and the monopolist advocates of free enterprise.

It is significant that the masses instinctively rallied round Mr. Giri. The efforts to tarnish his image by suggesting that he was a communist stooge miserably failed. The election is over, but the conflict continues. Nationalisation of banks and the revolt of the Prime Minister against the status quoist syndicate has triggered a process of radicalisation within the Congress. The great organisation that is having its sway over the country for the last so many years, is in the throes of a big change. Will it be possible for the toiling masses to transform the organisation in a manner so as to make it an effective instrument of radical change? The events of the coming few months will provide the answer. All these years, it was the capitalist and the monopolists who influenced and exploited the Congress organisation and its government to promote the interests of their class and to deny the working class their rights. Last year the people have seen the ruthless suppression of strike and the heartless victimisation of the workers. In the new context, it is hoped that at least the united strength of the working class will assert itself and compel the government to change their anti-labour policy and rectify the wrongs done to them. Mere high sounding words or the growth in the personal popularity of some leaders is not going to satisfy the people. Every action of the government will be judged and success of a policy will be measured by a single yardstick—how far it helps the people to become more and more assertive and to resist evil effectively in all walks of life. The events of the coming few months are going to influence and affect the social forces in a big way. A realignment of forces is inevitable and the opposition parties will be compelled to reassess the developing situation and make the necessary adjustments in their policy from time to time. They cannot afford to be dogmatic if they have the good of the country at heart. The socialists, along with the

other leftist parties, have to be very vigilant and active. It will be their task to mobilise the democratic masses with a view to taking the country forward on the road to socialism, secularism and democracy.

CHAPTER 11

TOWARDS SOCIALIST UNITY

THE PROBLEM of socialist unity has been there with us ever since the beginning of the freedom movement in India. In a vast country like ours, with a variety of creeds and varying conditions, the development of political consciousness is bound to be unequal. In the course of our struggle for freedom socialist groups came up at different places and at different times. By and large it could be said that such groups emerged in the wake of nation-wide movements like the non-cooperation movement in 1920. It was as a result of this movement that "the Workers and Peasants Party" in the year 1927 was formed. Very soon they established contacts with the international communist movement and the Communist Party of India came into existence. The Communist International in those days characterised our national movement as a bourgeois movement and, therefore, they remained aloof from it. In fact they went a step further and opposed the Satyagraha movement of the Congress in 1930. The youth of the country however was not impressed by the communist line and they joined the Satyagraha struggle in thousands. During their stay in prisons they read about socialism and Karl Marx. Comrade M. N. Roy's writings had also reached them and they became socialists. It was the socialist method of mobilizing and organising the masses on the basis of class struggle that attracted them to socialism. When the Satyagraha movement practically subsided and they came out of prisons, the Congress Socialist Party was founded under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Dev, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, Shri Yusuf Meherally, Dr. Lohia and others. While they could consolidate most of the groups that emerged at various places under the banner of the C. S. P. some of them, such as the Roy Group, Labour Party of Bengal, Punjab Socialist Party, remained out. The task before the C. S. P. was to bring them in and very soon they succeeded in their efforts. But the Roy group went out

of the party after M. N. Roy's release from prison, only to dissolve itself later on in search of a partyless democracy.

The Communist Party of India was hostile to the C. S. P. from the beginning. They characterised the C. S. P. as the "left manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie." The emergence of the C. S. P. was considered by them as a threat to their existence. They thought that their monopoly of Marxism was being effectively challenged. Naturally they became the bitterest enemies of the Congress Socialist Party. When the Seventh Congress of the Third International met in Moscow and decided to change their policy towards the national movements, the Communist Party of India also changed its policy and the Congress Socialists under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narain began their efforts to have a united socialist movement. Immediately after its formation the C. S. P. at Meerut had accepted the Marxist creed. It was dreamt at one time that the C. P. I. and the C. S. P. would combine to form the Marxist Socialist Party of India. However, the socialist leaders to their dismay found that the communists were not honest. They completely unmasked themselves when Soviet Russia was attacked by the Nazis. The Communist Party of India was a branch of the Third International and, therefore, they were not free to have an independent line in India. Besides, their means and methods were different from those of the socialists who were a part and parcel of the Freedom Movement. Very soon the socialists realised that under the existing situation not only that merger with the Communists was impossible, but even cooperation with them was difficult.

The C. S. P. was in the forefront during the Quit India Movement. Indeed, they conducted the struggle in the name of the Congress and, therefore, could enlist the cooperation of every important section of the Congressmen who were not socialist then. Since the Congress as well as the C. S. P. were declared unlawful organisations they had to work underground. Indian Socialists learnt their first lesson in underground work during the Quit India Movement. In those days the Communist Party was in league with the Imperialist Government. The socialists along with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi were dubbed as fascist agents and all the terms of abuse at their command were showered by the communists on the socialists leaders who conducted the movement from underground. It

was very natural, therefore, that the socialists and the communists became the bitterest enemies of each other. Many of us have not been able to overcome that allergy even to this day.

When the socialists came out of the prisons and from underground at the end of the World War, they were at the height of their popularity; but they did not start functioning as the C. S. P. immediately. During the underground days a section of the leadership cherished the idea of functioning as a loose group along with their non-socialist colleagues of the illegal days with a view to making the Congress itself a socialist organisation. Mahatma Gandhi encouraged them in this and at one stage he even proposed to the Working Committee leaders the name of Acharya Narendra Dev for the Presidentship of the Congress. Since Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister, Gandhiji thought that it would be in the interest of the country that a great socialist and a freedom fighter be at the head of the Congress Organisation. This idea of Gandhiji was rejected by a section of the leadership of the Congress and unfortunately Gandhiji was killed by the bullet of an assassin. His tragic death was a great loss to the country and particularly to the socialist movement in India. The political situation changed very rapidly and the socialists were compelled to leave the Congress organisation. Undoubtedly, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru could have saved the situation. He could have prevailed upon the Congress to accept the socialist pattern of society as its objective and persuaded the socialists to continue in the Congress. At least he could have resisted the amendment of the Congress constitution that prevented the existence of the C. S. P. inside the Congress organisation. Unfortunately, he did nothing of the kind. The socialists came out of the Congress and started functioning as the socialist opposition. They resigned their seats in the legislatures and sought fresh elections on the socialist party tickets. They however, were persuaded to continue their membership of the Constituent Assembly.

The Socialists contested in the first General Elections under the new Constitution. It was expected that they would be able to make good showing. But the results belied their hopes. The Congress Party secured about 80 per cent seats although they could get only less than 50 per cent votes. Anti-Congress votes were divided by a number of parties, who, with their

intention to oppose the Congress, in effect, opposed each other. One of these parties was the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party which was formed just on the eve of elections.

Paradoxical as it looks, the leaders of the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party like Acharya Kripalani, Dr. P. C. Ghosh, Sarvashri Damodar Menon, T. Prakasham, Adityan and others who as Gandhians, had opposed the socialists, were left with no other alternative but to leave the Congress and form a new party. They found that the Congress organisation was in the hands of such persons and power cliques that it was impossible to reform it. Even though they disagreed with the basic tenets of socialism like the class struggle, they agreed with their characterisation of the Congress as an organisation that stood for status quo. This made it possible for leaders of the socialist party and the K. M. P. P. to meet and devise means by which, they could cooperate in the impending general elections. But it was very late in the day. The Socialist Party had already selected their candidates for the various constituencies. It was difficult to disturb the arrangements. Therefore, in several places the two parties had to fight not only the Congress but also one another.

The results of the elections proved that the Congress no more had its former hold on the people. In spite of their organisational strength and financial resources, the Congress secured less than 50 per cent of votes but secured 80 per cent of the seats. This was due to the division of opposition votes amongst themselves by the several all-India parties. These parties were about a dozen in number. This gave an impetus to a rethinking in the opposition. In Madras, the Congress failed to have an absolute majority and they were not willing to have any coalition with others. The K. M. P. P. and other non-Congress parties, therefore, tried to form themselves into a block. The communists compelled the socialists to reconsider the whole situation once again. The leader of K. M. P. P. Acharya Kripalani also gave an indication that his party was not inclined to extend the process of block formation to the central legislature in view of the basic difference of approach between the communists and the K. M. P. P. The socialist leaders thereupon took the initiative and proposed a socialist block in the Parliament composed of the Socialist and the K. M. P. P. members. This was readily agreed to and this alliance in the Parliament started the process which culminated

in the merger of the Socialist Party with the K. M. P. P. That is how the Praja Socialist Party came into existence.

This merger of the two parties provoked a controversy in the socialist ranks. The ideological issues of class struggle and belief in Marxian principles were kept out and the merger was brought about mainly on the basis of practical and pragmatic considerations. Indeed, it was regarded by some of us as the betrayal of Marxism and the methodology that goes with it. From the very beginning we were told that Gandhism and Marxism were not reconcilable. Nevertheless it was conceded that Marxism had to be worked out in a given situation. The Indian situation had its own peculiarities and it was in this respect that Mahatma Gandhi made his valuable contribution to socialism. He pointed out that he was as much interested, if not more, in bringing about a radical change in the socio-economic structure of the Indian society. The objective of the socialists and the Gandhians was a casteless and a classless society. The socialists fondly believed that if they bring about radical changes in the economic structure with a view to removing the economic disparities, the social inequality would automatically be removed. In the first place this assumption was not at all warranted by the experiences of the down-trodden. Secondly, it is futile to expect that the economic inequality could be eradicated without attacking the evil of social inequality based on birth in a particular caste. Gandhiji was not merely a theorist of revolution, he was a practising revolutionist. He was quick to realise that a revolutionary change in the Indian Society could be attempted only with the means and organs of struggle created in the process of a struggle. The Indian people must forge their own weapons of struggle and instruments of social change according to the given situation and the capacity of the people. Satyagraha was the biggest contribution to the armoury of the down-trodden in the world. Secondly, while one may not agree with the arguments put forth by Gandhiji, the fact remains that in the Indian multi-lingual multi-religious and caste-ridden society insurrectionary method was beyond the pale of practical politics. One must be satisfied with democratic and peaceful means, although it means tremendous patience. A peaceful civil disobedience movement cannot go on endlessly. After a time the movement has to be withdrawn or it peters out followed by a period of inactivity as far as the

resistance movement is concerned. For that period Gandhiji devised what he called the constructive programme. Looking back in the past, one is bound to think that the merger of the K. M. P. P. and the S. P. was not a blunder nor an essay in opportunism. Basically they were like-minded parties. Both had the background of our national struggle for freedom; they had developed under Gandhian leadership and had imbibed his teachings, maybe in varying degrees. Both of them wanted to bring about a radical change in the socio-economic structure of our society and build a new social order on the basis of secularism, democracy and socialism. This belief, in some fundamental moral principles, was a guarantee against the pragmatism involved in the merger from degenerating itself into rank opportunism.

There are still a few socialists who contend that the subsequent weakening and split in the socialist movement was the result of this unprincipled merger of the K. M. P. P. and the socialist party. This contention is not borne out by the facts of the situation. It is true that some leaders of the socialist movement became impatient and eagerly started searching for the areas of agreement with the Congress. Indeed, this was very strange for the party that started with the ambition to displace the ruling Congress. But they were not all from the K. M. P. P. In fact, this school of thought was led by a veteran leader of the former Socialist Party itself. Split was caused by various reasons. The main reason being the unwillingness of some of the important leaders to intensify the struggle against the ruling party who continued to heap injustice on the have-nots whom they were supposed to serve. A section of the leadership had become pessimistic and lost their will to power which is the life breath of a political party. Differences between this group and Dr. Lohia became more and more acute due to various unfortunate coincidences leading to his suspension from the Party. Dr. Lohia, therefore, felt that for him there was no other course but to form a new party of socialism. With this major split in the P. S. P. the cause of socialist unity suffered a great setback. When the K. M. P. P. and the Socialist Party merged and formed the P. S. P. the people who believed in democratic socialism were happy. It was hoped that this party would now develop as the democratic alternative to the Congress, but when the split occurred in the P. S. P. all these hopes were destroyed.

The split in the socialist movement was a line-clear to the Congress to go ahead with its misrule. Dr. Lohia after the revival of the Socialist Party promised the people that his party would displace the Congress from power within seven years, but the socialists failed to carry conviction to the people. Undoubtedly, they tried their best in their own way but at the end of seven years they found themselves nowhere near the goal. On the contrary, the socialist movement was further weakened as a result of the rivalry between the two wings of the movement. In contrast the traditionalist and the communist elements were comparatively strengthened when the socio-economic situation continued to deteriorate under the growing misrule of the Congress. Economic condition of the masses was worsening every day when in 1962 Communist China invaded the northern boundaries and grabbed our territory. Everybody knew that the effective answer to this deteriorating situation could be given if the two wings of the socialist movement united. The P. S. P. leadership under the pressure of their rank and file were passing resolutions expressing their willingness to unite. They were quite sure that Dr. Lohia would not oblige them unless they agree to his policy of uncompromising opposition to the Congress. His policy in regard to backward communities and weaker sections of the Indian society was another hurdle in the way. The policy in respect of English was another hard nut to crack. Frustration to the ranks of both the parties was so much that at one stage the socialist legislators in the U.P. Assembly belonging to both the wings combined and formed the United Socialist Party. This was done over the heads of leadership and therefore, even after prolonged negotiations nothing tangible came out of it. It seems that after his election to the Parliament in 1963. Dr. Lohia had a fresh assessment of the situation. With his rare political acumen and foresight he immediately realised the gravity of the dangerous situation that was developing. He came to the conclusion that the only way to save the country from disaster was to dislodge the Congress from power. That was not possible in the given circumstances, unless all the parties in the opposition made a common cause for the purpose. Dethroning the Congress was not the ultimate objective of his strategy. It was only the first step. The country could be saved only by reconstructing the Indian society on the socialist foundation. That would not be

feasible unless the socialist movement became united and powerful. Dr. Lohia therefore with his unique courage and candidness gave a call for unconditional merger. The P. S. P. leadership welcomed it. The rank and file was very happy. The merger was brought about unanimously and the Samyukta Socialist Party was formed in June, 1964. The date of the first conference was fixed and it was held on the 31st December, 1964 and 1st January, 1965 at Banaras. The number of delegates from both the wings was also fixed according to the terms of the merger agreement. But much before the Conference met discordant voices began to be heard. This was due to several reasons. There were sections of leadership on either side who were not very happy with this merger and its prospective development. It seems that some of them were not fully aware of the perspective that Dr. Lohia had in his mind when he plunged for an unconditional merger. As soon as he began to propound his policy of adjustment amongst all the opposition parties, that section in the former P. S. P. who were anti-Communist and who would not like to have adjustment with them under any circumstances became restive and started to have second thoughts. They wanted to riggle out of the agreement if a suitable opportunity was forthcoming. Some leaders of the old Socialist Party who could not forget their prejudices and grousing against the P. S. P. leaders issued statements and made speeches providing a handle to those who wanted to back out. Climax was reached when in the procession at Banaras there was some manhandling and a few untoward incidents. A big section of the P. S. P. leadership made use of these unfortunate developments and decided to break away from the conference. The P. S. P. was revived and the socialist forces became disunited and weak. If they were to remain united, the results of the 1967 elections would have shown a qualitative change in the political situation and could have opened a new chapter in the history of the Indian socialist movement, bringing hope and confidence to the toiling millions.

Results of the 1967 General Elections vindicated that stand taken by Dr. Lohia. By and large the people were disgusted with the Congress misrule. They had become impatient with it. Dr. Lohia perceived this popular feeling and advocated the policy of adjustment of seats amongst the opposition parties with a view to dislodging the Congress from power. The people

would have appreciated it. The opposition parties, however, ignored his advice. Nevertheless the people in their wisdom, and according to their capacity, implemented his policy by voting in favour of the best and the winning candidate from the opposition. If this was not so the Congress could not have been trounced in West Bengal despite the triangular contests. The results of the general elections triggered a process and in nine states Congress was dislodged from power. This became possible because the opposition parties agreed to form non-Congress ministries. Communists, Jan Sanghists, Praja Socialists, Socialists and even Swatantras together formed coalition ministries. For the time being at least, political untouchability was abolished.

The Samyukta Socialist Party knew very well that the State Governments have limited powers and they could do precious little to help the masses as far as their major economic demands were concerned. This is particularly so when the Central Government is in the hands of the Congress which represents the forces of status quo. Dr. Lohia so long as he was with us, cautioned us about the pitfalls in this bold experiment. He also suggested the line of action to strengthen our position in the non-Congress ministries and in the country. The surest guarantee was forging of mass sanctions and consolidation of socialists elements. For this he frequently stressed the need of socialist unity. He was conscious of the dangers inherent in the phase of non-Congressism. He visualised in his mind the next phase very clearly. It was inevitable that as a result of the interim experiment in non-Congressism points of difference in non-Congress parties would become more pronounced. In other words, those who stood for a radical programme would be compelled to come closer as against those who stood for status quo. In other words it was very likely that the process of polarisation would start and the Socialists would be forced to work in cooperation with the Communists. It was essential that in spite of this working together socialists preserved their identity and yet grew stronger and stronger. When Dr. Lohia agreed for unconditional merger with the P. S. P. he did it with a clear perspective. He wanted the socialist forces to unite and became quantitatively bigger and qualitatively more effective. Only a few weeks before his untimely death he had a meeting with Jayaprakash. It was his intention to use Jayaprakash Narain's good offices for bringing the P. S. P. friends

back to the S. S. P. fold. He realised that the experiment in non-Congressism and the interim phase of non-Congress Governments made this merger all the more necessary. After the General Elections of 1967 he asked the Socialists to go into non-Congress Governments on certain conditions. A time-bound programme was given and certain items of the programme were to be implemented within 6 months. If a non-Congress ministry failed to do that he wanted the socialists to come out of the ministry even though it might result into the downfall of the ministry. He did not stop with the time-bound programme to be implemented by the non-Congress ministry. He wanted us to be active among the masses during that period so that revolutionary energies unleashed by the weakening of the Congress stronghold could be organised and strengthened. This could be effectively done only through a mass movement. He knew that the non-Congress Government would not be able to deliver goods. For one thing, they were heterogeneous, although they had an agreed minimum programme. Secondly, there was no effective popular sanction behind them. It became absolutely necessary, therefore, to forge mass sanctions, or else, the Socialists would inevitably get bogged down in power politics.

The annual conference of the S. S. P. was held at Gaya in the last week of December, 1967. They met under the shadow of gloom caused by the death of their leader Dr. Lohia. Both in Bihar and U.P. socialist ministers in the non-Congress ministries were realising that some of their partners were not willing to implement the agreed minimum programme. Six months had elapsed, but in U.P. the party could not get implemented the most important items of their time-bound programme. Hence there was no other option open for them but to come out of the ministry and try to mobilise the masses in support of those urgent and immediate demands. Accordingly, the Gaya Conference gave a call for a nation-wide struggle. The resolution also called upon the party workers to extricate themselves from the Parliamentary power politics and concentrate their energy on party organisation. The impact of this resolution, however, was not properly appreciated, and the socialists in Bihar once again got themselves mixed up in ministry making. The Congress was also not sitting quiet. They were planning to get back in the saddle. With the assistance from the Centre they could

topple some of the non-Congress ministries and bring in the President's rule instead. The mid-term elections that followed revealed a new picture. Samyukta Socialists and Praja Socialists suffered a setback, while the Communists scored a victory in West Bengal and the Akalis in Punjab. Congress also did not fare well. They had hoped to give a stable government after the elections. But they miserably failed. The people now seem to have reconciled with the idea that the Congress may not be in power at the Centre after the 1972 General Elections. Naturally, they are anxious to see emergence of a better alternative. Which party or a combination of parties would take the place of the Congress? Only a rash and unthinking person would venture to give a definite reply to that question. Only an intelligent forecast is possible. Much would depend on how the opposition functions during the coming years. The people would very much like the Socialists to come to the forefront. Socialist movement, however, is at cross-roads today. On a number of occasions it has been said that their task is two-fold; they have to fight against both economic and social injustices. Many times social injustice becomes much more unbearable than economic injustice. Mahatma Gandhi did realise the immense magnitude and the complexity of the task that a real revolutionary in India has to perform. It was not for nothing that he emphasised the urgent need of abolishing untouchability and staked his life for that cause. It is shameful that after twenty-two years of freedom and the completion of three Five Year Plans, millions of human beings are still living like pigs. Not only the contradiction between the rich and poor is being intensified, but the social inequality born out of the die-hard **Varnashrama** order is becoming all the more intolerable. The need of the hour is to mobilise the oppressed and the exploited with a view to launching a broad-offensive against this growing menace of social oppression and economic exploitation. It must be remembered that reactionary forces and those who want status quo are also becoming active and aggressive. Those who want a radical change cannot afford to sit silent or get themselves involved in meaningless power politics. Confrontation is becoming inevitable whether one likes it or not. Under the circumstances, priority must be given to the task of mass mobilisation. In regard to the mass struggle the socialists will have to do a lot of rethinking. These struggles,

if attempted piecemeal, will not make an impact on the public mind. They have to be conducted in such a manner that they acquire a national significance. For the achievement of this objective coordination and unity is a must. If the socialists of different brands continue to plough their lonely furrows they will never reach their goal. They must unite if they are serious about their job. It is high time the P. S. P. and the S. S. P. realise that there is a third dimension to this problem, namely, that of the people. The people do not understand nor appreciate their differences—ideological or otherwise—which keep them apart. They would very much like the two to unite. If they do so, the very fact of unity would kindle a new hope in the people and as a result the Socialists would get greater support from them. Therefore, in this period of crisis it is very essential that they agree for an unconditional merger and strengthen the mass movement. Their differences can be hammered out across the table or finally in a conference. My efforts in this direction at the Jabalpur session of the S. S. P. did not succeed. But that does not mean the task should be given up. If the P. S. P. and the S. S. P. find it difficult to merge, they should at least agree to join hands for struggle on specific issues. It may pave the way for an eventual merger. They cannot afford to ignore this need of the hour. They would do so only at the risk of becoming irrelevant in the current political situation in this country.

CHAPTER 12

CHOICE BEFORE SOCIALISTS

THE SPLIT in the Congress organisation has created an unprecedented situation in the country. The crisis that follows poses a serious problem not only to those who owe their allegiance to the Congress but to the parties in the opposition as well.

The democratic socialists all these years contended that the character of the Congress party and the method of its functioning blocked all the progress. The resulting immobility created a state of stagnation which further intensified the sufferings of the toiling masses. The Socialists, therefore, argued that unless the Congress splits there could be no meaningful polarisation in the country. Now that it has happened, will they not summon sufficient courage to face the new situation with a fresh and courageous mind?

The country was being ruled by the Congress for the last twenty-two years and in the absence of a sizable and effective opposition it virtually became one party rule. The desire to keep power in their hands at any costs compelled the Congress leaders to adopt the method of consensus to arrive at important decisions. This was helpful to keep together the various contending sections which at times were mutually contradictory.

The consensus method helped maintain the status quo and traditionalist forces to have their sway in the organisation and submerge the forces of change. Consequently, as the socio-economic tensions began to grow with the changing situation, the Congress government became more and more incapable of taking timely and radical decisions on major issues.

The inability on the part of the ruling party to move with the times, intensified further popular tensions and discontent. There was no party in the country competent to channelise the discontent in the right direction. Inevitably the discontent exploded in different ways. Sometimes, it took the shape of communal riots. On other occasions, it manifested in the form of linguistic or

regional tensions and clashes, and at times in class conflicts and strike.

It was at this critical moment that Dr. Lohia conceived the strategy of what is called non-Congressism. Unless the Congress is dislodged from power, he argued, it would not be possible for the revolutionary urges of the masses to assert themselves. Dr. Lohia, therefore, appealed to all the opposition parties to come together and function with a single purpose, namely to dislodge the Congress from power. This was to be achieved by means of adjustments at the time of elections and mobilising masses on specific issues to fight injustice.

Unfortunately, he did not succeed in persuading the opposition parties to follow his lead, but the electorate on their own, being disgusted with the Congress monopoly of power and the resulting oppression and hardships, turned their face against the Congress and reduced its majority considerably in Parliament. In the states, the non-Congress governments emerged, but they failed to deliver the goods. They did not succeed in creating any impact on the mass mind.

Against this background, the Prime Minister in her struggle with the Syndicate, adroitly succeeded in catching the imagination of the masses by resorting to bank nationalisation. In contrast, the other group led by the so-called Syndicate, because of its discredited past, projected its image as one supporting the status quo and conservative forces.

Indeed it is true that the present split in the Congress is basically due to power politics. But the fact cannot be ignored that masses have started looking upon the Prime Minister and her supporters as progressive.

It is true that both the factions are swearing by democratic socialism. But henceforth mere professions will not be of any avail. The people will like to judge them by their actions. Undoubtedly, the masses would rally that faction which brings about rapid socio-economic changes by peaceful and democratic means.

Under the present circumstances, the wing led by the Prime Minister, because of her mass appeal and the support that she enjoys from various sections, has a greater potential to fulfil the historic necessity for a radical change and give justice and satisfaction to the common people. It must be remembered that the popular discontent in the country is having its effects

on the conflict in the Congress.

Therefore, the Opposition parties, and the Socialists in particular, cannot afford to sit on the fence and watch the game. Their socialist faith makes it obligatory on their part to have an objective analysis of the situation, with a view to devise a correct strategy of action to meet the challenge posed by the recent developments. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for them.

The stalemate, therefore, continued as before. The people were looking out for someone to come forward and give them a lead.

The conservative press is trying to present the Prime Minister's wing as pro-Communist. The President of the Indian National Congress, at the time of the Presidential election, went to the extent of declaring openly that a vote for Sri V. V. Giri was a vote for Communist and a vote for Sri Sanjiva Reddy was a vote for democracy.

The Socialists, however, must not allow themselves to be hoodwinked by such misleading propaganda. In the power-conflict, both the factions were anxious to enlist the popular support on their side. While the Syndicate fondly hoped to mobilise it by paper propaganda, the Prime Minister was quick to realise that some concrete action was necessary and by nationalising banks she did the trick. The other group was also free to follow the same line, but their dependence on the status quo and traditionalist forces made them incapable of initiating any measures involving radical change.

It is true that the Prime Minister's group is also heterogenous and by no means all her supporters are committed socialists. Indeed, it would be futile to expect the Congress to split into two factions on pure ideological lines—one socialists and the other non-socialist, as a result of the current power conflict.

If our contention that the Congress is still not a Socialist body is correct, it would be wrong to hope for such an outcome. Wishful thinking is of no avail in a situation like this. The Socialists on the basis of an objective analysis have to decide the character of the two factions and make up their mind as to which faction will be more helpful in the realisation of their objective. Their task at the present juncture is to forge mass sanctions and whichever faction is helpful for this purpose

should be preferred.

Evidently, the Prime Minister's factions are more amenable to mass pressure, and therefore, the Socialists must manoeuvre their forces in a manner which will compel her to translate her socialist professions into action. This will be possible only if the Socialists play their cards wisely and courageously. At the same time it is essential that they take immediate steps to consolidate and unite socialist forces specially outside the Congress, to make themselves more effective on the national scene.

The split in the Congress is a reality today and therefore the objective for which the strategy of non-Congressism was devised is more or less accomplished. This was a historic necessity if the country was to go ahead on the road of socialism. Now that it has happened, non-Congressism as conceived by Dr. Lohia becomes irrelevant in the current situation. With the expulsion of Smt. Indira Gandhi from the Congress party and the emergence of two rival Congresses there is no point in harping upon the old tune of toppling the Congress government with the help of anybody and everybody. The new government of Smt. Indira Gandhi is the government of the protestant Congressmen and this requires a fresh appraisal and a new strategy.

Surely, the Socialists do not want to replace this government by a government led by Swatantra-Jana Sangh-Syndicate combination. Such a combination would not be acceptable to the people and will be incapable of satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the people. Besides, it will be out to suppress the rising tide of mass movements. Undoubtedly, the democratic Socialists will only harm their own cause if they knowingly or otherwise lend a helping hand to Swatantra-Jana Sangh-Syndicate plan to dislodge the government of Smt. Indira Gandhi.

This does not mean that the Socialists should give blanket support to Smt. Indira Gandhi's government. Nevertheless it would be suicidal for the Socialists to attack her when she is actively engaged in a battle with the dark forces of monopolists and status quoists. Evidently this phase is not going to last for more than a few months. After that the Socialists can reconsider their stand and stipulate their conditions on which they would extend their support to the Government.

It is sometime contended that after her solitary act of bank nationalisation Smt. Gandhi has done precious little to translate

her professions into action. Indeed, one swallow does not make a summer. No one is naive enough to suggest that her government is a socialist-government. But at the same time it must be realised that in the present situation if the Socialists close their ranks and mobilise the masses in the right direction they could compel her to proceed further on the road to socialism. They could as well put before her Government and the people a programme on the following lines and concentrate their energies to forge mass sanction for the implementation of that programme.

1. Land reform legislations should be streamlined forthwith a view to redistributing land to the landless and giving security of tenure to the tenants. In states where there is the President's rule, the Central Government should issue ordinances to realise this objective. Various State Governments which at present are loud in their support to Smt. Indira Gandhi's government should be asked immediately to do likewise in their States.
2. Freezing of land values in urban areas to make land available for housing the poor and to stop the owners from pocketing the unearned incomes.
3. The Centre must take upon itself the responsibility of providing humble but decent housing for the conservancy staff employed by the local bodies before the end of 1970.
4. The anti-labour policy that is in vogue today must be changed in favour of the working class forthwith. All those victimised employees barring those guilty of violence should be reinstated. The recognition of trade unions and federations be restored and compulsory recognition of trade unions on ballot basis should be assured.
5. The responsibility of free primary education must not be shifted to the states. The Centre must take its own responsibility in implementing the Directive principles in this regard. This must also be done before 1971.
6. Work should be provided for unemployed on scarcity basis and immediate beginning should be made in areas which are identified as backward and strategic from the security point of view.

The discontent among the people has today assumed an alarming proportion. A fundamental radical change in the

socio-economic structure has become a must. If this task is not accomplished by peaceful and democratic means in the immediate future the masses may be driven into the fold of those who have no faith either in peaceful means or democratic methods. The main responsibility for avoiding such an undesirable development squarely rests on the shoulders of those who call themselves democratic socialists.

The S. S. P. and the P. S. P. have a special obligation in this respect. They must come forward unitedly to mobilise the masses for a speedy socialist transformation through democratic and peaceful means and thereby create conditions in the country which would provide a stable and a progressive government to the people.

—*Mainstream*—November 1969

A NEW DIRECTION FOR SOCIALIST PARTY

THE SPLIT in the Congress which enjoyed a monopoly of power for the last 22 years has created an atmosphere of indecision in Indian politics. What turn our politics is now likely to take? Will the Prime Minister carry on her Government in spite of her minority in the Lok Sabha, or will the Lok Sabha be dissolved? If the Lok Sabha is not dissolved, whose co-operation will the Prime Minister seek? These and many other questions are being discussed today. Different points of view regarding these questions are being aired. Though it is very difficult to predict what turn Indian politics will take in the future, one thing is certain beyond doubt i.e. the educated people are evincing a keen interest in the future of the country and especially of democracy.

Most people are today swearing by Socialism. Not only that, but claims of different parties give an impression that their mutually contradictory moves are intended to further the cause of socialism. As a result the masses are confused. Though it is difficult to determine as to which of these moves will take the country towards the goal of socialism, no one can deny that the current developments have roused new hopes in the minds of our people. Naturally people are anxious about the future policies of socialists who started their great pilgrimage to socialism as far back as 1934. Therefore, the debate over the policy which the socialists are likely to adopt in the present circumstances has assumed great significance.

The split in the Congress Party from top to bottom has definitely given rise to a special situation in the country. Consequently the currents in Indian politics have begun to flow in new directions. It may be that small, day by day changes would take place in this situation or some individuals or groups may shift loyalties. But that will not change the main direction of our political developments. The new situation is created not on account of the likes or dislikes of a few individuals. But

it is the result of a process in which different social forces are clashing with each other. In a situation like this, the individuals or their intentions do not matter much. But what is significant is the social forces which knowingly drive them to certain positions. Therefore, the socialists will do well to examine their policies in this context of clash of social forces. Before doing so, however, a hurried resume of social policies during the last twenty years will be of some use to us.

The socialists were forced to leave the Congress in 1948. Till then the socialists were working in the forefront of our national movement as its militant vanguard. But after Independence the socialists felt that the leadership that had acquired its grip over the Congress was incapable of completing the task of social revolution. At the same time the Congress leaders also asked the socialists to dissolve their Congress Socialist Party if they wanted to continue in the Congress. Thus the socialists were left with no choice but to leave the Congress. The socialists, while coming out of the Congress pledged themselves to complete the unfinished revolution and in order to accelerate that process decided to build up an independent socialist party. They also placed before the people their policies and programmes for the fulfilment of their objectives. Their main task was to build, in opposition to the Congress, the Socialist party as an alternative to the Congress. But in doing so, they decided not to co-operate with either the Communists who had remained aloof from and at times opposed to the freedom movement, or with such parties which were opposed to secularism and were inclined to encourage communal forces. The socialists wanted to establish their power through the triple weapons of prison, spade and vote. In accordance with this policy the socialists party plunged in the first General Election in a big way. But unfortunately they did not meet with the expected success. This failure in the first elections drove some of the leaders to frustration. This feeling of frustration and defeatism on the part of some leaders gave birth to what was called "The theory of compulsions of backward economy and of searching areas of agreement with the Congress Party." But this theory divided the leadership of the Party. This division ultimately split the party in 1955. At this juncture some leaders left the party to join the Sarvodaya movement, some retired from politics while some others joined the Congress.

Though the leaders of the Praja Socialist Party thus betrayed the movement, the rank and file of the party stuck to their guns and continued their anti-Congress policies. In 1962 after the debacle on the Chinese border, the bankruptcy of the Congress rule was completely exposed. To save the country from this Congress misrule became an urgent necessity.

But due to the divisions in their ranks, the Socialist movement was too weak to accomplish this task. Therefore, Dr. Lohia advised the Socialist Party to call for unconditional merger with the P. S. P. Out of this merger was born the Samyukta Socialist Party. Taking into consideration the then existing situation in the country Dr. Lohia gave a new policy to the S. S. P. Dr. Lohia had realised that the revolutionary forces were stifled and that the process of change had become stagnant on account of twenty years of monopoly and misrule of the Congress. He knew that these forces could not be unchained unless the Congress was dislodged from its position. Therefore, the main objective of the new policy was to dislodge the Congress. Dr. Lohia thought that as the revolutionary forces would be liberated they could be brought under the banner of socialism by expanding the scope and intensity of people's struggle against injustice. He, therefore, advised opposition parties to follow a strategy of adjustment among themselves with a view to defeat the Congress. Simultaneously, he suggested the formation of coalition Governments on the basis of agreed minimum programmes wherever the Congress lost its power. But while doing so he insisted on the coalition ministries to undertake immediately on assumption of power certain important programmes which would make an impact of change on the people and would thus rouse their enthusiasm. But it seems many of us did not understand the importance of this suggestion. Dr. Lohia had clearly seen that the Socialist movement had lost its nationwide character and that its influence was limited. Therefore, the growth of their resistance movement has its own limitations. In order to make good this weakness he wanted to use positions of power for certain immediate and significant changes which would have an impact on the people, and would in turn, change the political atmosphere in the country. Some friends in the P. S. P. did not understand the significance of this attitude of Lohia and therefore they left the S. S. P. The S. S. P. finalised its strategies in the

Kota Conference. To seek the co-operation of all the opposition parties with a view to dislodge the Congress, to intensify the people's struggles on issues of popular discontent, to strive for bringing about Socialist unity and to seek help on specific issues of those who are not socialists and thus maintain an atmosphere of cooperation; these were the main facets of the Kota strategy and to break the Congress monopoly of power was its prime objective.

The Fourth General Elections greatly reduced the Congress majority in the Lok Sabha. In a number of States the Congress was defeated at the polls. While in some others, it lost its power due to internal conflicts and defections. All these factors helped to weaken the Congress monopoly. But so long as the Congress was entrenched at the Centre there was little scope for non-Congress ministries to prove their abilities. However, the non-Congress ministries failed to do whatever little they could. The main reason for this failure seems to be the difference that arose among constituent parties while implementing the agreed programme. Although the S. V. D. ministries were formed on the basis of agreed minimum programmes some of the constituent parties had not genuinely accepted the programmes. Thus in Bihar on the issue of land ceiling and crop-sharers the Jan Sangh clashed with the S. S. P. and the C. P. I. Whereas in Uttar Pradesh while the Jan Sangh and the B. K. D. hastened to abolish the Urban Property Tax, they refused to fulfil the assurance given in respect of abolishing the land revenue on uneconomic holdings. This resulted in an open clash between the S. S. P. and the B. K. D. These incidents were broadly speaking, symptoms of the beginning of a sort of polarisation on the basis of programmes among the opposition parties themselves. In addition to these internal conflicts, the misuse by the Congress of its authority in the centre hastened the process of ending the S. V. D. Governments. The people had nourished great hopes regarding these S. V. D. Governments, but since they belied these hopes, an atmosphere of frustration once more engulfed the country.

The differences among S. V. D. constituents which were respon-

* This refers to the mid-term poll for Bihar, U.P., W. Bengal and Punjab assemblies held in February 1969.

sible for their downfall were again reflected in the mid-term poll.* On account of these differences the various parties who were partners in the Governments could not co-operate with each other in the mid-term elections. The attitude of Jana Sangh in both Bihar and U.P. and of the CPI in Bihar was indeed significant in this context. The fall of S. V. D. ministries and the situation obtaining in big states like U.P. and Bihar after the mid-term poll complicated the political atmosphere in the country. By this time the power conflict in the Congress also came to a head. At the time of the Presidential election, both the camps in the Congress carried against each other a war of allegations. The Prime Minister's group alleged the Syndicate of having entered into a secret pact with the Jana Sangh and Swatantra in order to dislodge the Prime Minister. On the other hand the Syndicate accused the Prime Minister of having played into the hands of the Communists. But whereas the Syndicate were content with only waging a wordy war, the Prime Minister shrewdly acted. Her clever move to nationalise the fourteen major Banks and to remove Shri Morarji Desai from her cabinet outwitted the Syndicate. It must be borne in mind that the split in the Congress finally materialised on the background of the controversy over bank nationalisation. The Socialists cannot afford to ignore the fact that this situation was cleverly exploited by the Prime Minister's group to project their image among the people.

Although the Prime Minister still enjoys a majority support in the Congress Parliamentary Party, her absolute majority in the Lok Sabha no longer exists. Therefore, she will have to rely on the support of some opposition groups in order to carry on her Government. Thus the Congress monopoly at the Centre has also come to an end.

The Government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi cannot be considered as a Socialist Government by any stretch of imagination. But the Prime Minister and her group have today acquired a good deal of popularity in the country because she nationalised the banks and smashed the Congress big wigs who were bossing over the organisation and the country for such a long time. One has to take note of the fact that these actions have roused the hopes and aspirations of the people and has caused a great stir among them. For the last so many years popular discontent

used to explode through regional, linguistic or communal demands. But now these parochial issues have been relegated to the background and people have begun to think of national issues like poverty, unemployment, etc. Whether the Government of Mrs. Gandhi will be able to solve these issues or fulfil the peoples' aspirations is difficult to say. But her Government can be tested if we organise this newly born consciousness and hopes among the people and bring their pressure upon her Government for the fulfilment of their demands. The real character of her Government cannot be decided only by discussing her vices and virtues or her intentions, but her actions in the face of massive popular pressure.

It is true that the present split in the Congress is essentially a result of power conflict. But the Prime Minister having taken a programmatic posture to outwit her opponents can now retain her position only if she does something to fulfil the assurances which she has given to the people. What will happen if she fails in this task? The answer to this question depends upon what the radical parties are going to do. If the radical parties devote their attention to mass work and prepare the people for a peaceful struggle for their rights, the Prime Minister will either be compelled to concede their demands or the masses will throw her out of power and replace her Government by putting in power such persons who are determined and tested in their loyalty to socialism.

The Congress in opposition is also now professing socialist policies and programmes. This is certainly advantageous from the point of the socialist movement. In view of all these developments and taking into consideration all the aspects of the situation, it is necessary that the socialists once more examine their policies and decide upon their strategy. It will be almost impossible hence-forward to bring together all the opposition parties to defeat the Congress. Because, firstly, the Congress is not one today. Secondly, in some States the Syndicate section of the Congress is in power and is opposed by the Prime Minister's Congress, whereas in the Centre and some other states the Prime Minister's Congress is in power and the Syndicate is opposed to him. In this context some friends argue that since the Prime Minister's group is in power in the Centre we should make it the main target and carry on the old policy to topple it.

This argument appearing to be sound is fallacious because even in the Centre the Prime Minister has lost her majority. Secondly, some of the opposition groups have definitely made their choice either in favour of the Syndicate or the Prime Minister's group. Therefore the very basis for bringing all the opposition parties together no longer exists.

In the context of deciding our policy one more point which needs to be taken note of is that for some time to come the country shall have to live with coalition Governments. It is impossible for the socialists to come to power on their own in the near future. Therefore, they will have to choose some friends and will have to work with them on the basis of a long-term radical programme. It will be of no use to dilute this programme in order to make it acceptable to all. On the contrary the programme on the basis of which socialists will have to work and seek friends must insist on fundamental radical change. It would not be out of place here to indicate a few salient items of such a programme though a detailed one cannot find place in this note.

- (1) To fix in definite terms minimum wages and ceiling on income.
- (2) To drop the right to property from the list of fundamental rights.
- (3) Stop all evictions forthwith. No family should be allowed to hold land equivalent to more than three economic holdings and all surplus land should be distributed among the landless.
- (4) Repeal all anti-labour laws immediately. Cancel all victimisation in Government and public sector. Accept the principle of recognising trade unions by ballot.
- (5) Stop all individual transfers in relation to urban land. Control living space on the basis of family size in big cities. Impose strict control on use of urban land.
- (6) A phased programme of giving all education free up to the age of eighteen should be worked out. Regional languages be the medium of education at all levels. Regional languages should be the official language of the States forthwith.
- (7) Provide accommodations within a period of one year to all workers doing the work of conservancy.

- (8) Energetic and immediate steps be taken to give special opportunities to Harijans, Adivasis, and other backward sections with a view to ultimately abolish the present unequal social system.
- (9) Adoption of common civil code for all the citizens.
- (10) Provide work to all able-bodied men and women in rural areas who will come forward to ask for it. A Five Year Plan to cover the entire country under this scheme be formed and to begin with minimum one district in each State should be included in the scheme.

The socialists will have to work on the basis of such a definite and time-bound programme. They must mobilise the people and pressurise the Government for the implementation of such a programme in cooperation with such friends who would be ready for this work. If some parties are not prepared to accept the entire programme we would not rule out co-operation with them on specific issues.

The new policy does not at all envisage unconditional support to the Government of Mrs. Gandhi. She may be supported in so far as she brings forth any progressive measures or legislation. But we will have to oppose her tooth and nail if she pursues any anti-socialist or anti-democratic policies. However, if a party in the Parliament wants to discredit or pull down the government on an anti-socialist issue, the S. S. P. need not be obliged to support such a move.

Adoption of clear thinking alone is not sufficient for the success of socialist policies and programmes. It is necessary to unite all the socialist and pro-socialist forces in the country for this purpose. We should take a lead in this matter. Socialists must be very careful in the use of their words and behaviour if they want to accomplish this task. We must cast off our prejudices and preconceived notions regarding other groups because they also must be feeling the necessity to revise their attitudes as we want to revise ours.

Actually we should have adopted such an attitude for the success of our policy of non-Congressism. But in the absence of such an attitude we have failed to reap sufficient advantages from the disintegration of the Congress. We should at least rectify this mistake in the future.

After deciding our policies as suggested above the socialist should bend all their energies on organising mass struggles and encouraging constructive activity among people. Today all the parties are swearing by socialism. But the real character of every party will be tested in the people's court only. The people will give their verdict on the basis of their demands.

The discontent that is mounting during the last so many years can be eradicated only if their just demands are fulfilled. Under such circumstances, the prime duty of all democratic socialists will be to unite all their forces for bringing sufficient pressure on the Government for the implementation of people's demands. If the socialists fail in this historic task, the discontented people may be driven to the fold of those who believe in violent and anti-democratic methods and history will blame us for this eventuality. On the other hand if the Government of Mrs. Gandhi would oppose these demands backed by organised public opinion, her popularity will soon ebb and the socialists can seek a mandate from the people in the forthcoming elections.

* This article was written with a view to explain his point of view which the party should adopt after the split in the Congress. It appeared in the souvenir brought out at the Sonepur conference of the S. S. P., January 1970.

CHAPTER 14

CHALLENGE FOR THE SOCIALISTS

THE SPLIT in the Congress has created a new political situation which demands from every political party a fresh appraisal of its policies. Mrs. Indira Gandhi's wing which remained in power could no longer claim an absolute majority and the balance of forces was disturbed. In her capacity as Prime Minister, however, Mrs. Gandhi pledged herself and her Government to remain loyal to the common people and implement the radical programme adopted by the Congress in May 1967. By this radical posture she succeeded in securing the support from some parties in opposition.

It is contended on behalf of the ruling Congress that the split was due to ideological reasons. They said that the old leadership in the Congress was hesitant if not unwilling to implement the 10 Point Programme. This, it was argued, was the main cause of the Congress losing its hold over the masses. In the Bombay Session of the New Congress it was proclaimed that they would go ahead with the Socialist programme and restore the old image as the fighting body. The young Turks and some other genuine elements in the Congress fondly hoped that this could be achieved and the great Congress Organisation could be revitalised. They believed that the resolution passed in the Bombay Session was a positive commitment on the part of the leadership and, therefore, thought that the New Congress could be moulded into an effective instrument of radical change. The socialists and other radicals in the opposition, however, could not take them by mere pronouncements. They never believed that the main reason for the split was ideological. They, however, recognised the fact that bank nationalisation set in motion a process of change which could be accelerated by effective mass mobilisation to reach the goal of a socialist society. The bold step taken by the Prime Minister did generate some enthusiasm amongst the masses and gave the hope that the New Congress might go ahead on the road to socialist reconstruction.

But the experience of the last year or so has belied these hopes. Even the Young Turks, who were so enthusiastic in the beginning, began to doubt whether the leadership had the necessary will and determination to go ahead with the declared programme. They found a sense of complacency descending on the leadership and the conservative and reactionary forces going ahead to consolidate their positions.

The task before the socialists, whether inside or outside the Congress is to stop the rot and save the situation from the danger of the reactionary forces getting on the top. Indeed, the new situation has posed a challenge to all those who swear by socialism, democracy and secularism. This challenge could be met successfully only if the socialist movement in the country is revitalised.

Whenever one thinks of strengthening the socialist movement, the first thought that occurs to one's mind is that of the merger of the S. S. P. and the P. S. P. Indeed, it would be helpful if such a merger, immediate and unconditional, was brought about. It would at least help broadening the base of the socialist movement. But organisational merger of the two parties by itself will not take us very far. Undoubtedly, it would strengthen the socialist wing in the Parliament and would have a favourable impact on the public. But the real strength and power to bring about the radical change comes from conscious and purposive mass action. The socialists, therefore, if they are serious, must bend their energies for the development of a mass movement of the toiling millions in the fields and factories.

In the absence of mass sanctions, all talk of socialist reconstruction would be an exercise in self deception. To avoid such an eventuality, a three-pronged strategy of combative, ideological and constructive programme of action is necessary. For that purpose, the first and the foremost task of the socialist movement would be to identify the immediate and urgent needs of the masses and to mobilise them for their fulfilment. It will be recalled that even during the freedom movement, land reforms were considered as the first item on the priority list. In the Karachi Session in 1931, a resolution for the abolition of landlordism and for the distribution of land among the peasants was adopted.

Unfortunately, after 24 years of freedom, the promise given to the tillers of the soil, by and large, remains unfulfilled. Despite the abolition of landlordism, the promised land reforms have not been lifted out of the records. In the socialist policy of combative mass action, land reforms and the distribution of land to the landless must acquire top priority along with the problems of unemployment and the disgraceful social inequality that persists even to this day. In spite of several successful Five Year Plans, unemployment figures are mounting and the gulf between the poor and the rich is widening. Millions of people are still without shelter and the socially backward communities continue to suffer humiliating treatment at the hands of the upper castes. The socialist movement has to accept the challenge and forge popular sanctions through mass struggle for the eradication of these evils.

Before launching a mass movement, the nature and form of the struggle must be gone into thoroughly, if it is not to end merely in sound and fury. It has to be admitted that until now, most of the struggles conducted under the banner of socialists are more or less symbolic and restricted to the participation of their party cadres only. The broad masses, for whom these struggles are intended, continue to remain aloof and passive. Therefore, it is essential the forms of the movement must be such as to ensure involvement and participation of the broad masses in a big way. The fact cannot be gainsaid that this would become possible only when all who those profess to work for the exploited join hands to lead such a struggle. Evidently the leadership of the mass struggle must necessarily be a united leadership of the parties and groups, who agree to co-operate in this historic task.

While we concentrate on the task of the mass mobilisation, the socialist cannot afford to ignore the forces that would make a concerted effort to checkmate and obstruct their rising waves of mass action. One of the surest weapons that the reactionary forces could employ is to create communal disturbances and violent riots. The socialists must not commit the mistake of underrating their opponents. It is clear that after the Fourth General Elections the graph of communal disturbances is on an upward curve. It should be remembered that even during the

days of the freedom movement the foreign government shrewdly took advantage of the communal tensions that exist amongst us. It is very easy to foment a communal riot and the national leadership had to be ever vigilant about this danger. In the new context, after attainment of freedom, our tasks are positive and much more stupendous.

Communal disturbances are bound to be more harmful and destructive to the positive task of building a socialist society. The very fact that India is making some progress in developing its economic strength is itself an eyesore to Pakistan and China with whom we are continuously trying to have a good neighbourly relations. They not only fail to respond to our friendly gestures but they are becoming more hostile to us and to our objectives. The revolutionary movement of the toiling masses is halted and weakened whenever a communal riot breaks out. Therefore, the toiling millions and their leading cadres will have to be re-educated regarding the mischievous role of communal fanatics and agents provocateur. The real revolutionaries will have to wage an ideological warfare with the supporters of religious chauvinism. When they talk about secularism they must realise its connotation and its significance in the present context.

The recent riots in Ahmedabad, Chaibasa, Bhiwandi, Jalgaon etc. have a special lesson for all those who aspire to reconstruct and modernise Indian Society on egalitarian bases. The situation demands that all those who stand for secularism, democracy and socialism should unite and forge a secular front to resist effectively the menace of communalism that threatens to disrupt the revolutionary movement of the suppressed and exploited masses. The ideological struggle on the mass fronts will have to be conducted at all levels from the villages to the big cities.

That brings us to the third prong of our strategy and programme of action. Let it to be realised that one of the main reasons why the Congress failed to implement its programme is the want of active and committed cadres. Even the failure of the Congress Governments to prevent communal riots is due to their dependence on the administration and its coercive apparatus. Political parties are gradually becoming mere election machines. This in a underdeveloped country is disastrous. The contemplated socialist movement of the masses must take special care to create cadres of workers from amongst the masses during the course of the

CHAPTER 15

FORGING MASS SANCTIONS

SRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI is in power now for over a year or so and it would be useful to make an assessment of her achievements and failures. It is true that she was the Prime Minister even before; but her hands were not free, it was argued. There were many elements in the old Congress which did not allow her to go ahead with the Ten-Point Programme.

Therefore, when she decided to act she took away the Finance portfolio from Shri Morarji Desai and straightaway issued an Ordinance nationalising fourteen major banks in the country. Although this was mixed up with the Presidential election, her bold action did give an impression to the general public that she was serious and wanted to go ahead without fear or favour.

The split in the Congress occurred on this background. With it came to an end the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress making Smt. Indira Gandhi's Government at once a minority Government. In this melee, new adjustments and alignment of forces were bound to take place; particularly the radical parties were compelled to make a fresh appraisal of their policies and strategy of action.

Undoubtedly, the composition of the party that the Prime Minister is now leading is not very much different from the Old Congress. No wonder, therefore, that she has not succeeded in fully implementing even some items from the Ten-Point Programme with which she decided to start. For instance, the necessary follow-up measures after the bank nationalisation have either been delayed or given up. On the contrary, the recent rise in prices was due to granting of unwarranted credits leading to inflationary trends.

The Bill for the abolition of Privy Purses was introduced only in the Budget Session and one does not know when it will be passed and when the action thereon would be taken. It seems the idea of imposing ceiling on urban properties is almost aban-

doned. Nationalisation of general insurance appears to have suffered the same fate.

The most important item of the programme from the point of view of the rural masses was that of land reforms. It was expected that the State Governments controlled by Smt. Gandhi's party would take some immediate and effective steps to give security to the tenants and relief to the landless. But nothing of the kind has been attempted.

In regard to the nationalisation of import and export trade nothing tangible has been achieved. On the contrary, the strangle-hold of big monopoly groups and foreign capital on our economy is getting strengthened.

The split in the Congress and the situation arising out of it did create a new climate for radical change. But nobody ever suggested that Smt. Indira Gandhi's Government was a socialist Government. Being a chip of the old block, her party was not very different in character from the Old Congress.

A lot of dead wood continues to hang on to her party which is bound to be a hindrance in the implementation of a radical programme. The vested interests and the monopolists have maintained if not increased their hold on the Indian Congress as before. Any radical measure that affects the vested interests adversely is bound to be opposed.

Even so, it was expected that she, with her passionate longing for radical change, would take courageous steps despite the opposition from certain elements within her own party. The radical parties on their part, it was assumed, would develop mass pressure to compel her to go ahead. Unfortunately, these expectations and hopes have remained unfulfilled.

The Prime Minister in her anxiety to keep herself in power dared not do anything that would antagonise some of the elements in her party. She seems to depend on manipulations and manœuvres more than on any programme of action. But that will not take her very far.

She must remember that her Government survives because of the support that she is getting from certain radical sections on the Opposition benches. They are doing so out of their fear that in the event of her defeat, a more reactionary government might come into power. However, this cannot go on endlessly.

The radical parties and particularly the Socialists, it was

hoped, would come forward to take advantage of the climate of change and mobilise the masses and create a situation where the Prime Minister would be compelled to act or in the alternative lose her growing popularity.

In spite of their flamboyant resolutions, the Socialists rather than go to the masses preferred to engage themselves in summit manipulations and power politics at the State level. Consequently, the masses are getting more and more disillusioned and in their frustration have started admiring those who indulge in adventurism.

This situation cannot remain stationary. It must either change for the better or for the worse. Either the radical parties have to mobilise such forces that would compel the Government to expedite implementation of a radical programme, or the reactionary forces are bound to come on the top.

It is no consolation that the Grand Alliance has failed to materialise. The status quo forces are already well-entrenched in the society. It does not make much of a difference to them if the Grand Alliance does not come into existence.

A stage has been reached where it would be futile for the Socialists to expect further radicalisation from the Government of Smt. Gandhi unless she is compelled to do so as a result of mass pressures.

Ever since the split in the Congress it was clear that in the absence of mass mobilisation on the basis of urgent demands such as distribution of land to the landless, provision of shelter to the homeless, job for the millions of unemployed, a breakthrough could not be achieved.

It is essential for all those who believe in peaceful and democratic methods and profess to work for the oppressed and exploited millions to come together and bend their energies for such mass mobilisation. Rather than doing this, the various parties of the Left, have frittered away their energies in manipulation to break and make Ministries.

It was expected that at least the two wings of the Socialist movement, namely the S. S. P. and P. S. P., would lose no time for a nationwide mass movement in the interest of their objectives. This in its turn would have started a process leading to the much-desired socialist consolidation.

Unfortunately, the work among the masses, both combative and constructive—which normally must enjoy top priority in the

programme of action of the socialist parties—is being neglected and the performance in the legislatures and summit politics have acquired the first place.

Socialists of all shades agree that the present situation in the country poses a challenge and that could be met only by forging an instrument of change through mass struggles. The masses today are extremely frustrated. Even after twenty-three years of Independence, assurances given during the struggle for freedom remain unfulfilled. Exploitation of the toiling millions is on the increase and discontent mounting.

The democratic Constitution when it was adopted, particularly the Directive Principles enshrined in it, had created a hope among the working masses that now their aspirations would be fulfilled sooner or later. The events of the past few years and some judgements of the Supreme Court have created doubts in the minds of the people—whether it is possible to bring about fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure within the present constitutional framework.

These structural changes are absolutely essential if it is intended to give justice and satisfaction to the majority of the people who are now getting disillusioned and desperate. The need of the hour is to create confidence among the masses that it is possible to achieve a breakthrough on their own strength. Only a powerful mass movement for the fulfilment of the basic demands of land and employment could generate such a strength. Nothing short of an agrarian revolution is going to bring about the desired change in the mood of the rural masses.

Under these circumstances, it is futile to hope that this could be achieved by means of some arrangements with the Ruling Congress. A mass upsurge alone will compel the elected representatives to give justice to the exploited and the down-trodden. It is not suggested that Parliament and the legislatures are not useful. But in the present context its importance is secondary. It can be used as a forum for voicing the grievances of the aggrieved masses.

But unfortunately the differences among the Left Parties hinge upon this point, namely, the relationship with the Ruling Congress. The talks between the S. S. P. and the P. S. P. for a merger came to a deadlock mainly on this issue. This undue importance to summit politics becomes a hindrance in the way of our mass

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CHAPTER 16

SATYAGRAHA ONLY WAY TO GOAL

DOES GANDHI and his teachings have any relevance today? This question is being debated for the last few years and particularly in this year of his birth centenary. It is really pertinent that this question should be posed at a time when the atmosphere in the country is full of violence and reports of violent clashes are daily pouring in with increasing frequency from different parts of our country.

Mahatma Gandhi came in our midst at a time when the younger generation was getting impatient with the imperialist British rule—and the masses increasingly felt that their problems could not be solved until freedom was achieved. The so-called constitutional methods of the moderates had become an object of ridicule and they were attracted by the cult of the bomb. Gandhiji instead offered them the weapon of civil disobedience and his doctrine of satyagraha. He pointed out that even violent insurrectionary methods would fail without powerful mass backing. He demonstrated that the masses could be mobilised in a big way through civil disobedience and satyagraha.

Under his leadership, the satyagraha movement raised the consciousness of the people to a higher level. Besides, it threw up a large cadre of conscientious and dedicated workers who would have become the architects and builders of a new social order had Gandhiji's advice to transform the Congress organisation into a Lok Sevak Sangh been accepted by the Congress leaders. The movement had a tremendous impact on the youth, who were gradually persuaded to accept the Gandhian movement of satyagraha and civil disobedience as an alternative to the violent revolutionary methods for achieving freedom. Gandhiji made it clear that if he talked of non-violence in the context of our freedom struggle it had a certain meaning. What he meant was that for the vindication of their right to freedom the Indian people need not resort to violence.

India has now set itself on the road to socialism. Can it be said that his peaceful and democratic methods have the same validity and that they can be used as effectively for the realisation of our socialist objectives? Socialism evidently means fundamental structural changes in our socio-economic order. It connotes a new structure of society on an egalitarian basis. Is it possible to achieve that objective by means of peaceful satyagraha and the civil disobedience?

Considering the two-fold task that socialists have to perform of putting an end to social and economic inequality, the direct action method preached by Mahatma Gandhi is not only valid but the only way to reach our goal and also to keep the unity of our country intact. Here in India, social inequality is based on **Varnashrama** and the caste system. In the Hindu fold a person becomes high and respectable by the virtue of his being born in upper class. Likewise, he or she is treated as low in status simply because they are born in a caste that is considered low and even contemptible.

After the attainment of freedom it was hoped that the major problems of poverty and social inequality could be solved by progressive legislation. It was argued and it is still being contended that satyagraha has no place in free India. But the experience of the last 23 years has belied these hopes and proved without doubt the futility of these arguments. The Congress organisation and its government, in spite of the monopoly of power it has enjoyed al these years, have failed to redeem the promises given to the masses during the freedom movement.

Untouchability was abolished by law and its observance made a penal offence. However, in practice the evil persists. Of late we see important men coming forward even to justify the system of **Varnashram** based on birth. Likewise, the system of land-lordism was abolished by law. Nevertheless, the tillers who had a right on their lands under the old system of landlordism have been deprived of their legitimate claims in various parts of our country. The old zamindars, with the connivance of the authorities, have resorted to unlawful and unjust methods to dispose the poor peasantsly of their rights. The feudal property of the landlords has gradually grown into capitalist property. Something could have been said in their favour had they helped the area to develop industrially, but nothing of the kind has been done.

The violent trends that are growing today have to be understood in the context of the deteriorating socio-economic situation. Discontent is mounting everywhere, tensions are growing and the rural poor are becoming poorer. Their helplessness and the growing frustration makes them an easy prey to the protagonists of violent means. In the urban areas, growing unemployment and lack of housing facilities are creating a situation highly congenial to the growth of violence. Our young men do not see any solution to their problems. Naturally, they become impatient with the socio-economic system and when they take to violent means for changing the system they are termed as Naxalites.

Let it be remembered that the phenomenon of Naxalism is the outcome of the problem of poverty that the landless and the down-trodden were facing in the Naxalbari area. It is now spreading to other parts of the country, including the urban centres like Calcutta. It is no use condemning the young men who are taking to the path of violence. One cannot hope to put down their movement simply by ruthless, coercive methods. Their challenge can be successfully met only by removing the causes that produced this situation. If we want to avoid violence the efficacy of the alternative method of peaceful and democratic change has to be established by example.

It has become a fashion to condemn our young men as traitors when they impatiently take to violent methods for bringing about a social revolution. But there is at least one thing to be said in their favour; they are actuated by high ideals. What is to be said of possessing classes who resort stealthily and cowardly to unlawful and violent methods to protect their vested interests. Are they not being selfish? And, their hypocrisy is thoroughly exposed when they talk of law and order to protect their ill-gotten wealth. Whoever stands up for the rights of the down-trodden is branded as Naxalite. In fact the possessing classes on various occasions function as inverted Naxalites.

The freedom movement forged mass sanctions that compelled the British to transfer power to the Indian people. But during the last 23 years, the possessing classes have cleverly acquired the monopoly of power and wealth. Broad masses of our people are, once again in the mud, deprived of their power which they had won on the strength of their movement. The basic question is how to forge mass sanctions once again and compel the posses-

sing classes to divert their power in favour of the common people. In other words, how to create the necessary strength and determination in the masses to bring about a radical change in the social order.

I believe that Gandhiji's teachings have, in the present context become more relevant than ever before. It is obvious that simply by preaching and propagating his thoughts very little could be achieved. This is being done all the year during the centenary celebrations without any lasting impact. Those who believe and hope to blaze an alternative path of peaceful and democratic means of change will have to demonstrate by action the efficacy of such methods. Unless they throw themselves in the masses with abandon and help them regain their self-confidence, nothing will be achieved.

The youth of the country would feel enthused to forget their petty individual ambition once they see that the masses are on the move in a big way. The recent movement of direct action and civil disobedience started by socialists is a humble effort in this direction. They are helping the masses to stand up against injustices and resist the evil by peaceful means. The success of this endeavour will depend on the degree to which the socialists demonstrate the efficacy of civil disobedience and persuade the masses to participate in the struggle in greater numbers. Today we have no Mahatma Gandhi amongst us. Nevertheless, if a sizable number of our workers dedicate themselves to the cause and do their duty to the best of their ability, there is no reason why a new leadership cannot be taken up in time to come.

The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi are not only more relevant at home but all the more relevant in the world context of today. In this age of nuclear warfare, the danger of human race being annihilated is more than imaginary. The human race will be destroyed if the positive approach of Gandhiji is not accepted and sincerely acted upon. He wanted the human race to grow into one family. He hoped that this would happen when the force of human love for each other works itself out through the method of satyagraha both in its combative and constructive aspects. He told us that no person is an enemy for a true satyagrahi, who fights against the forces of evil and the systems embodying those forces. If Gandhiji's teachings are accepted, the rich nations must assist the poorer countries.

to develop even as in our country every one who regards him as the Father of the Nation must run to the assistance of the last man in the queue waiting for justice.

3 October 1970.

CHAPTER 17

S. S. P. LEADERSHIP AND MASS AWAKENING

THE CONTROVERSY in the Cong-O over the resolution tabled by Shri Manubhai Shah and others and also in regard to the recent observations made by Shri S. K. Patil and Shri Kamaraj, is a pointer showing the direction of the wind that is blowing in the country. They have now become aware of the fact that the split in the Congress has released forces which are not easy to control. Therefore, a section of the leadership in the Syndicate has started thinking in terms of unity with the Indicate. Probably, they are trying to get control of the State machine which is now going in a direction different from the one they had envisaged. This is an excuse to strengthen the rightist forces which, it seems, have lost hope of getting back to power by themselves.

The split in the Congress created an extraordinary situation but its significance was not adequately appreciated at the time when the great organisation broke up into two. This split started a process which is developing very fast into a revolutionary situation. It is obvious now that the revolutionary energies that are being unleashed cannot be contained by any of the existing parties despite their revolutionary professions. The Congress-R is also incapable in giving it a correct direction.

The complete strike by the Maharashtra Government employees is an instance in point. The Ordinance illegalising the strike and the threats of mass dismissals have failed to have any effect on the employees whose expectations have been whetted by the revolutionary phrases and high-sounding resolutions of the Congress-R. The toiling masses are not prepared to stop in their forward march come what may. To attribute a political motive to this strike is adding insult to the injury. The fact remains that the masses are on the move in a big way, but who will give the correct direction?

The parties who swear by radicalism, and particularly the Socialists, are expected to play their historic role at this critical

juncture. The Socialist movement in this country stems from the freedom movement with nationalism, secularism and democracy as its sheet anchor. When the masses are seething with discontent and surging forward, it is the duty of the Socialists to provide them with a clear and determined lead. In the absence of such a leadership, the masses are likely to get confused and misled by the vested interests.

It is a great pity that the dominant leadership of the S. S. P. is still obsessed with their outmoded line of non-Congressism. Making common cause with the Jana Sangh, the Swatantra and the Syndicate, in the present situation is in itself a cause for confusion and is likely to checkmate the process of mass awakening. Rather than guiding the revolutionary masses in the right direction in their march forward to socialism, knowingly or unknowingly, the Socialist leadership is helping in putting down the revolutionary mass upsurge. History will not forgive them whatever may be their intentions. Objectively, the role that they are playing today in the name of non-Congressism is bound to bring harm to the cause of socialism.

When the Socialists launched their mass civil disobedience movement, it seemed that they were correcting their mistake and their struggle did attract the attention of the country towards the issues raised by them and the demands for radical changes. Unfortunately, recent developments in UP have dashed those hopes. They have once again thoughtlessly decided to treat the dangerous path of summit manœuvres and ministry making and breaking.

As if this was not a sufficient shock, the S. S. P. leadership decided to withdraw the civil disobedience movement. They should have realised that the movement started for land distribution was not something mechanical which could be switched off and on according to their convenience.

Land liberation movement started on August 9 along with the P. S. P. and C. P. I., is a process of social change. Individuals or parties can withdraw from it if they so choose but the movement cannot be withdrawn. Having put the masses on a revolutionary path, to step aside would be nothing short of betrayal.

There is still time to correct the mistake. The experience of the last few weeks in the U.P. has clearly shown that participation in the S. V. D. Ministry is a frustrating experiment. It

has a detrimental effect on the party organisation, and is spreading demoralisation in the rank and file.

Fortunately, the annual conference of the S. S. P. will be held in the near future. The mistakes committed could be set right if the party ranks who have already indicated their disapproval, assert themselves from now on and compel the leadership to withdraw from the S. V. D. Ministry. The Party Conference must emphasise the urgency of mass mobilisation and work out plans released during the land liberation movement.

The States, October 1970.

CHAPTER 18

ELECTION STRATEGY FOR SOCIALISTS

ONE CAN safely assume that the General Elections are round the corner. It is quite likely that the Prime Minister may dissolve the Lok Sabha and force an early election. In that case the country will go to polls by March 1971. Even otherwise the elections are due by the beginning of 1972. It is, therefore, necessary for the various political parties to chalk out their respective election strategies.

It goes without saying that the election policy of each party should be consistent with its main objectives. Those parties which are working for an all-out social revolution must take particular care in this behalf. Before taking any decision they must make an objective assessment of the situation. For the socialists, their assessment of the political situation when they left the Congress is still relevant. They had then realised that so long as the old social structure and power apparatus is intact, any amount of electoral manipulations would not take them to their goal. The late Dr. Ambedkar had warned that unless the political equality established by the constitution is followed up by social and economic equality the constitution itself may collapse. This warning has fallen on deaf years and consequently social oppression, economic inequality and poverty are on the increase. The popular discontent is daily accentuating and some people have started preaching that democratic methods are useless and violence alone will solve the problem of the down-trodden. The socialists must take into consideration this situation while deciding their election policy.

The Socialists came out of the Congress with a firm resolve to work for the unfinished revolution. Had they stuck to this resolve and worked unitedly and steadfastly, the situation in the country would have changed. But unfortunately socialist movement split into two and again got itself too much involved into parliamentary politics to the utter neglect of constructive and

combative mass work. On the contrary, the Congress which was swept into power over the waves of national movement used that power to safeguard the vested interests and strengthen its own monopoly.

Naturally popular discontent began to mount but in the absence of a nationwide political alternative, it found expression in various regional, casteist and tradionalist manifestations. This was harmful to our unity and progress. Therefore Dr. Lohia advocated a two-pronged strategy. He urged the opposition parties to come together for seat adjustments and thus break the Congress monopoly of power. Simultaneously he called on the socialists to unite their ranks and build up a powerful alternative by mobilising the forces that would be released after the end of the Congress monopoly. This strategy worked in the 1967 elections and the Congres was dislodged in a number of states.

The strategy of non-Congressism undoubtedly ushered in a new era in the country's politics. But we must remember that non-Congressism was not meant to be a permanent policy. It was not an end. It was a means to break the Congress monopoly and start a process of change. It was with this objective that Dr. Lohia asked non-Congress ministries to fulfil certain items of programmes within six months of assumption of power, failing which he asked his party to get out of the non-Congress ministries. When the party experienced that non-Congress ministries did not implement the agreed programme, we asked our ministers to come out. It became clear that motley alliances of various parties with divergent and even contradictory views cannot implement any programme of social change. Therefore in its Gaya conference in 1968, the party decided to come out of such alliances and to prepare for a nationwide struggle for the implementation of that programme. Had we sincerely worked for this decision with devotion and single-mindedness, the results would have been quite different and happy. But the leadership got itself involved in power politics and summit manipulations. As a result dissensions grew in the party and its image did not remain as clean and attractive as before.

The split in the Congress has brought about a qualitative change in the situation. It was, therefore, necessary to make suitable changes in the party's policy and strategy as well. The leadership of the party failed to assess the impact that the Prime

Minister had made on the mind by her dismissal of Shri Morarji Desai and consequent nationalisation of banks. Instead of adopting a new strategy to expose the hollowness of the new Congress slogans the S. S. P. leadership gave the slogan of "Indira Hatao". They lost over a year in their futile efforts to bring all the opposition parties together to dislodge the Prime Minister. But in doing so, they did not bother to explain to the people as to what was their objective and how could it be fulfilled with the help of such status quo parties like the Swatantra and Jana Sangh.

On the contrary, had the party bent its energy on mass movements, either the pressure thus generated might have forced the Government to implement some programmes or the hollowness of the new Congress would have been exposed and the Prime Minister's popularity would have been reduced. At last the S. S. P. took to this path in August 1970. But the leadership's mind was still entangled in office politics. When they saw that the split in the Congress had brought them a chance to get into the ministry in Uttar Pradesh, they abandoned the movement and joined a ministry whose main constituents had vehemently opposed our Land Liberation Satyagraha.

I think it is necessary not only to continue, but to intensify the movement for land redistribution. Because unless popular forces are roused no revolutionary programme can be implemented even if you get in power. Today even if all the left parties unitedly fight the elections, it would not be possible for them to capture power for the people. That does not mean that I propose to boycott the elections. Parliament and legislatures are a very important forum to express peoples' aspirations and grievances and as such it must be used. But it must be remembered that the real struggle of the exploited and the down-trodden will have to be carried on in the streets, fields and factories. Our election strategy also must be devised in such a way that it must help the main struggle of direct action and mass resistance.

From this point of view it would be better if all the parties who advocate radical change come together for seat adjustments. The left parties must not allow themselves to fight against each other. The strategy of non-Congressism in which opposition parties with divergent views come together for dislodging the Congress is now out of date. If the forces of radical change are not

ANSWER

Simplification

suicidal.

CHAPTER 19

SOCIALISTS AT THE CROSS ROADS

A LOT OF water has flown under the bridge since the Political Resolution was adopted at the special session of the S. S. P. at Sonepur in January 1970.

It is true that the Resolution was passed by near unanimity. But the fact cannot be denied that it was a compromise between two factions in the party. These two factions differed on the assessment of the political situation arising out of the split in the Congress organisation. While one section held that the split triggered off a process of polarisation the other section thought that it could not have caused such a major change in the alignment of forces to justify a basic shift in the policy of non-Congressism.

The former group contended that the Nijlingappa Congress is predominantly led by persons who are pro-capitalists and status quoists. This was proved by their actions. They openly showed their inclination towards the Swatantra Party and Jana Sangh. On the contrary, the Congress led by Smt. Indira Gandhi had taken certain very important decisions such as nationalisation of banks. Whatever may be the motive behind it, this tactic on the part of the Prime Minister has created new hopes and aspirations in the minds of the exploited and the down-trodden sections of our society. By her pronouncement she has committed herself and her Government to carry out a programme of radical change. If she retraces her steps and fails to fulfil the hopes she has generated, she will lose her popularity. It is the duty of those who stand for radical change to build up pressures and mass sanctions compelling her to implement the programme. Therefore, instead of trying the toppling game by manipulations at the top level, the socialists should concentrate and devote their energies to the task of mass mobilisation.

Smt. Indira Gandhi's party no longer commands absolute majority in Parliament. She has to depend for support from some of the parties in the Opposition. Non Congressism, therefore, as

conceived by Dr. Lohia was inoperative in the new context. It has lost its **raison d'être**. His idea was to break the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress Party. That objective has been more or less achieved by the split in the Congress. Even in the States where the non-Congress Governments were formed after the 1967 General Election, Dr. Lohia put down certain conditions. He asked them to perform certain specific tasks within a given time-limit. The tasks were such that they would make a powerful impact on the mass mind. Indeed, the policy of non-Congressism was conceived with a view to strengthening socialist movement.

By the end of 1967, however, it was realised that the S. S. P. ministers were not able to do very much in the Coalitinn Governments. The Gaya Conference of the S. S. P. (January 1968) therefore gave a directive to our ministers to quit the Ministries. It also urged upon workers to prepare for a nation-wide movement.

From this point of view, even after the split in the Congress, the situation had not changed so as to demand any shift in the policy. If at all there was a change, it was in favour of revising the policy of non-Congressism and concentrating on mass mobilisation and struggle.

Those who had a different view contented that the split in the Congress has not caused a major change. It is true that the Indira Congress no longer enjoys absolute majority in Parliament. But that is all the more reason to make all-out efforts to topple her Government by combining with all the parties of the Opposition.

They refused to see that this was only good arithmetic, but not realistic politics. Consistently, with their stand they insisted that in U.P. and Bihar, the S. S. P. M.L.A.s must join hands with the Jana Sangh, Swatantra, and the Congress (O) to keep Congress (R) out of power.

In spite of these differences, the two factions in the S. S. P. had certain points of agreement. Both of them were of the view that neither of the two wings of the Congress is socialist in character, whatever be their pronouncements. Likewise, both of them believed that the radical change in the socio-economic structure of our society is impossible to accomplish except by means of developing mass sanction and organs of mass struggle. Indeed it was because of these points of agreement that the compromise resolution became acceptable at Sonepur.

The real rub however was in regard to the policy to be followed in Bihar and U.P. The key point regarding this policy issue was to decide which wing of the Congress should remain in power. In this respect the Sonepur resolution laid down that the S. S. P. must not join any combination which did not endorse a definite time-bound programme. A second pre-condition for the participation in any Ministry was that the party with which we will join in the coalition must agree to implement this programme if it was in power in any other states.

These two conditions did not give satisfaction to those who were against aligning with the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra. Compromise, however, became possible only when it was conceded that in Bihar, the S. S. P., which was the single biggest party in the Opposition, would be allowed to form a Ministry under its own leadership and with the support from any party whatsoever. The implication was obvious : It meant that they could accept support from the Congress (R) as well.

Unfortunately the strategy devised by the Sonepur Conference did not succeed. The party did not succeed in forming as S. V. D. Government either in Bihar or in U.P. The story at the Centre was not very different. The idea of combining all the parties in the Opposition to topple the Indira Government could not materialise. The Swatantra leaders refused to be parties to any toppling programme unless there was agreement on the alternative that would replace the Government in power. The Communist parties and the D. M. K. refused to join in this effort for an alternative to the existing Government. From this it is obvious that non-Congressism had only a notional existence in the new context.

Under these circumstances, the party leadership was compelled to fall back on that part of the Sonepur Resolution which enjoined mass struggle and civil disobedience movement. Accordingly, there was a massive demonstration in front of Parliament on April 6, 1970. The police behaved in a nasty manner with the demonstrators. They made a brutal lathi-charge on the unarmed masses although they were assured that there was not going to be any defiance of law. Party General Secretary Shri George Fernandes was severely wounded and had to be hospitalised for a week or so.

This gave an impetus and fresh inspiration to our workers to go ahead with the programme of mass mobilisation. Civil dis-

obedience movement was launched on the basis of the Eight-Point programme in the Sonepur Resolution, and it succeeded in attracting the attention of the public on a nation-wide scale. Very naturally, the demand for the redistribution of land acquired the pride of place in the struggle. The masses from the lowest rung of our social ladder and particularly landless labourers, tenants and small farmers joined the struggle in large numbers. Fortunately, the P.S.P. and the C.P.I. had also launched the land liberation movement simultaneously, and therefore it helped to highlight the issue of land reforms. The movement created new hopes and aspirations in the rural masses, and the Socialist movement was once again put on the political map.

The attitude adopted by the Jana Sangh, the Swatantra and the Congress (O) towards the movement is very significant. Not only did they criticise and oppose the movement but took out processions against it in collaboration with big landlords. These were the very parties which had agreed to the land reform programme when the S.V.D. was formed. Even during the non-Congress Government of 1967 the story was not very different. They did everything possible to oppose the implementation of that part of the agrarian programme.

The open hostility to the land liberation movement has caused deep resentment in the Socialist ranks. They have set their face against combining with parties like the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra who are openly against radical programmes. Encouraged by the success achieved in the first phase of the movement they were eagerly looking forward the consolidation of the revolutionary elements thrown up during the struggle and building up of new cadres through political education for the preparation of the new phase of the campaign.

But, unfortunately, the collapse of the Charan Singh Government in U.P. gave a new turn to the situation. The S.S.P. leadership there hastened to take the initiative in forming an S.V.D. The National Executive later on permitted the U.P. party to join the S.V.D. Government. The National Executive did so although the conditions laid down in the Sonepur Resolution remained unfulfilled. The National Executive also declared that the first phase of the movement was now complete and that the movement was to continue only in selected areas. Whatever might be the interpretation of the Resolution, the impression on

the public mind has been that the movement stands withdrawn.

This action on the part of the National Executive in the absence of the General Secretary and the Chairman who were in prison, has caused a lot of disappointment in the party ranks. There is a feeling that this amounts to, knowingly or unknowingly, an act of betrayal. It has dampened their enthusiasm and the new workers who were attracted towards the party in the course of the struggle have been confused. This movement is not something which could be switched on and off at our sweet will. It is a sort of a process and it will continue. One can withdraw from the movement but the movement cannot be withdrawn.

The formation of the S.V.D. Government in U.P. has caused confusion in the public mind in respect of our policy and programme of action. The wrangle over the selection of ministers has given rise to a lot of heart-burning. The Party workers have started feeling that the stance of toppling the Indira Government at the Centre is being used merely as a cloak to hide the lust for office that is growing in the Party. The question that naturally arised in their minds is, whether we can strengthen the party by running after a few crumbs of power. Is that the objective for which we have been carrying on the socialist movement they ask. Even if it is conceded that the movement was not withdrawn and what the leaders wanted was a pause after the completion of the first phase, the National Executive Resolution makes no mention of a plan for the next phase of the movement. There is no reference to the talk of consolidating the revolutionary elements that have been thrown up in the movement.

Immediately after these developments in U.P., some leaders in Bihar started busying themselves to repeat the same experiment in that State also. The developments that are taking place presently in that State make it abundantly clear that the leader of the S.V.D. Shri Kapoori Thakur, would very soon be called upon to form an S.V.D. Government. In case a Government is formed it is to be hoped that Shri Kapoori Thakur would at least insist on a definite time-bound programme, particularly in regard to land distribution and land ceilings.

Are we to believe that the S.V.D. Governments would be in a position to implement some of the demands for the realisation of which the 9th August movement was launched? Could we hope that the parties who opposed our movement vehemently would

now agree to land ceilings and redistribution? The strategy conceived by the late Dr. Lohia namely that of adjustment of seats amongst all the Opposition parties to depose the Congress from power, and break its monopoly is being misused. The objective of this policy was to release revolutionary mass energies and to strengthen the socialist movement. Even at that time when he advised the Executive at Bhopal to go in for non-Congress Governments, he did not do so unconditionally. Certain definite and stringent conditions were laid down. Our ministers were directed that within six months they must implement certain items in the programme that would create an impact on the mass mind. The items were enumerated in the resolution. If the ministers fail to implement at least a few of these items from the programme, they were given a definite directive to come out of the ministries and concentrate on mass work.

After the death of Dr. Lohia, the annual session of the Party was held at Gaya in the month of January 1968. After going through the pros and cons of the situation, the Conference unanimously decided to call back the S.S.P. ministers. The Conference also adopted a resolution urging the party members to prepare for a nation-wide struggle. It was because of this directive that the Kerala ministers of the S.S.P. were asked to offer satyagraha in Kutch and when arrested, to resign. This caused a serious rift in the Kerala S.S.P. and quite a number of our leaders and friends in that State left us for good. From this it should be clear that the Gaya Conference was very serious in respect of the nation-wide mass struggle that was projected in the resolution.

However, the policy decision made unanimously by the Gaya Conference was not effectively implemented. It would be recalled that the Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal (B.P. Mandal) Ministry was toppled after the Gaya Conference, and the S.S.P. in Bihar had taken the lead for that purpose. Consequently, the party once again got bogged in ministry-making and breaking. These frustrating experiments have resulted in weakening the party organisation. Our rank and file is confused. This is not non-Congressism either. This is spurious variety of non-Congressism which is no better than political opportunism. Knowing fully well that the Indira Government at the Centre cannot be toppled by these tricks and gimmicks, we should understand that the

party's cooperation with the Rightist forces such as the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra will only help the consolidation of forces that are avowedly against socialism.

The economic situation in the country is going from bad to worse. The rising prices, mounting figures of unemployment and the problem of housing of lakhs of people in the cities is helping the discontent to mount. Happenings in West Bengal should be treated as writings on the wall. It is in a way a challenge posed for all who believed in democratic socialism and its achievement through peaceful means. In West Bengal, an atmosphere of violence is developing with intensity. The recent laws promulgated by the Central Government is not the answer. These laws give to the police more or less all the power that army men enjoy under martial law. No one who believes in democracy can give his support to such draconian measures.

But mere opposition does not serve our purpose. The people of West Bengal have their grievances and certain urgent problems have been waiting for solution. Unless and until those who believe in peaceful means show by their example and help the people in West Bengal to stand against this meaningless violence, democracy cannot be saved. The people in West Bengal are confused and do not know what they could do. It is for the leaders to show them the alternative path for the achievement of their demands. When they see for themselves that an alternative path and method are developing they would follow that path, and fall in line with that programme.

The successful strike of the Government employees in Maharashtra is also an eye-opener. The strike was banned by law. Thousands were suspended and discharged and yet they did not surrender. From where did they get this courage and determination? The Prime Minister has made pronouncements from time to time that we have to march forward on the road to socialism. The masses are on the move, and nobody would succeed in stopping them.

The hopes and the courage that is born out of the new situation must be taken note of. Despite socialist slogans, the advantages of Swaraj and the Five Year Plans are being monopolised by a handful of capitalists and their camp-followers in the cities. In the rural areas the big landlords and men around them reap all benefits of development. The rich are getting richer and the

poor, poorer. Can the Congress Government or the Governments led by other parties bring about a change in this situation? The Prime Minister and her Government talk loudly against monopolists. But at the same time concessions are made to make them more powerful. Foreign capital is also spreading its tentacles far and wide.

It is true that the Prime Minister and her Congress did take a courageous step when the banks were nationalised. The de-recognition of the princes with their privy purses by an executive order also created an impression of courage and determination. But after it was struck down, she has started saying that the Government is committed to pay compensation.

It seems that these people have come to believe that by merely keeping power in their own hands they will be able to bring about a radical change in the structure of the society by democratic means. In order to stick to power they have to win elections. Only the money bags can provide these means to win elections. If they oblige the politicians, do the politicians think that they will be able to curtail the power of big business?

This is vicious circle and has to be broken somewhere and very speedily. In the country today hundreds of crores of rupees are in circulation which go by the name "black money". It is unaccounted and therefore it has created a rival black-market. The Prime Minister of Ceylon has recently shown by her example the way to bring this unaccounted money to the surface. Because of this black money, conspicuous consumption, pomp and wasteful expenditure have become the order of the day. All the national leaders express their displeasure and condemn these wastages.

Will Smt. Indira Gandhi summon enough courage to follow the example of Smt. Bandarnayake? In sum, it could be said that although in the beginning the Prime Minister took certain courageous decisions, of late she is hesitating. Her pronouncements have given rise to new hopes but it seems that they are not going to be fulfilled in the near future.

The Samyukta Socialist Party Conference is scheduled to meet next week in Poona. The Conference must take stock of the situation and decide upon a policy that will take them forward on the road to socialism. There is a revolutionary situation developing in the country. Discontent is growing and if it is not given

CHAPTER 20

CONSTRUCTIVE COMBATISM

SOCIALIST workers all over the country are evidently happy over the merger agreement between the SSP and the PSP. The decision of the Indian Socialist Party to unconditionally join the ad hoc committee of the new Socialist Party will only add to their sense of happiness. It is indeed the socialist rank and file which has suffered most due to the split in the movement. It has been their lot ever since the beginning of the Socialist movement to work against heavy odds for the realisation of their cherished ideal. For all these years they have chosen to remain in political wilderness for the sake of the movement. Yet there is hardly any achievement which they can proudly claim as the result of their labour and suffering. Their only solace was that they were struggling and suffering for a lofty ideal. However, when they find their ranks split for reasons they fail to understand, they are deprived of the only silver lining to the dark cloud around them—the joy of struggling and suffering together. Naturally, the unification of the socialist parties has kindled a new hope in their failing hearts. Even ordinary men and women, who looked upon socialism as a means to put an end to their suffering, were going through a period of confusion and frustration during these days when the socialist party was split into small groups. The new party has given rise to fresh expectations in their hearts too. The new party must, therefore, take particular care to see that these hopes and expectations are not belied. From this point of view, it would be useful at this juncture to look back on our past and see if we could find some guide lines for the future.

The socialist movement in India stemmed from the national struggle for freedom. During the freedom movement, the younger generation could not but feel the impact of Russian Revolution and the philosophy of Marxism. They felt that the national movement could not be strengthened unless the toiling millions, on the basis of their day-to-day demands, were organised in their

class organisations. In the process, it became inevitable to define the content of our freedom. Thus the socialist movement worked within the broader context of the national movement for freedom. But since these socialist ideas were not acceptable to elderly leaders of the national movement, a separate socialist party working within the Congress was formed. As we look back now, we have to admit that our ideas regarding the tasks of the socialist movement were not quite clear in the early days. We realised much later that the socialist movement in India had to perform a twofold task — the eradication of economic disparities and removal of social disabilities. The social disabilities in our country have a unique character of their own. In developing his philosophy, Marx was not expected to take into account the problems and difficulties which the Indian socialist would be called upon to face. The varnashram system of the Hindu Society and the practice of treating men as high or low on the basis of their birth in a particular caste, has created almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of our progress. Unless this problem is tackled simultaneously with that of economic exploitation, the socialists in India cannot succeed. In the early days, we ignored this aspect of our problem and concentrated our energies mainly on economic issues. It must be admitted that Gandhiji had a better understanding of our problems than many of our socialist and marxist pundits.

Socialists were indeed unhappy when the leaders of the national movement agreed to the partition of the country as the price for freedom, because it stifled the process of national integration and of sharpening the class struggles. Power was accepted without creating the necessary mass sanctions for radical transformation of society. The socialists, therefore, decided to come out of the Congress and work for the completion of the unfinished revolution. They decided to function as a democratic opposition under the new constitution. Upto this point, the socialists were on the right track. But their effort to secure a parliamentary majority without adequate mass support and popular sanctions was a serious shortcoming of the socialist policy. And when they were badly defeated at the polls in the first general elections, the leadership failed clearly to identify this weak spot in the movement. Instead, a section of the leadership propounded the so-called theory of political compulsions of a backward economy and tried

to search for areas of agreement with the ruling Congress. This created a confusion among the ranks and a rift in the leadership, which ultimately spilt the movement into two parties. Dr. Lohia, who led the breakaway Socialist Party, advocated a tough policy towards the ruling Congress and special opportunities for the backward sections of the society. Obviously this was the correct line, but he could not carry the majority of the movement with him and therefore failed to forge the necessary sanctions for the implementation of his line.

In the meantime, the conservative elements were gradually raising their heads and the Congress which virtually enjoyed the monopoly of power, was fast getting isolated from the masses. The discontent in the toiling millions was mounting every day and manifesting itself in different forms such as communal rifts, linguistic troubles, regional antagonisms etc. The Chinese invasion and the reverses suffered by our forces, deepened the crisis. Dr. Lohia could smell disaster in the rising national discontent on many fronts and with a view to avoid it, he came out with a bold new policy. This new policy had two prongs : one, unconditional merger of the socialist parties, and the other, wider co-operation among the opposition parties — both on the parliamentary and mass fronts. Thus the Samyukta Socialist Party was born and it was hoped that it would march ahead and soon grow into a credible alternative to the Congress. Unfortunately, Dr. Lohia's strategy was not fully appreciated by a section of the P.S.P. leadership and the socialist movement suffered another setback as a result of the split at Varanasi. The result of the 1967 elections, however, vindicated the correctness of Dr. Lohia's strategy. A fresh opportunity to develop a credible alternative came our way when the opposition parties were compelled to form non-Congress ministries, in which both the wings of the socialist movement participated. This was the right time for the socialists to move closer, but unfortunately the leadership in both the parties did not avail itself of this opportunity.

The split in the Congress party that came in the wake of the presidential election in the latter half of 1969, changed the political scene in the country as never before. This was another opportunity for the Socialists. But the S.S.P. leadership, instead of properly and objectively assessing the changed situation, continued to harp on the policy of anti-Congressism which had

actually become out of date due to the split in the Congress. They committed the mistake of equating the Indicate Congress with the old discredited united Congress. On the other hand, the P.S.P. leadership went to the other extreme of starting a meaningful dialogue with the Indicate in the hope of evolving a correct socialist policy and programme. This meaningful dialogue produced nothing but the sterile attempt to allocate seats in the midterm Loka Sabha poll. The S.S.P. leadership, on their part, persisting in their old line of anti-Congressism, landed themselves in the camp of conservative and traditionalist parties. No wonder that both these wings were rejected by the electorate since neither of them offered a real radical alternative to the Congress and neither could project any identity of its own. By the adoption of these policies, not only has the Socialist movement received a setback, but its image has also been tarnished.

The results of the mid-term poll have compelled the two socialist parties and other socialist groups to come together and form a single party of socialism. The new party will shun policies of united fronts and will work on its own with a view to providing an effective instrument of radical change.

It is necessary that the new party clearly defines the tasks that it is expected to perform in the present situation, especially when the ruling party is professing socialism from the house tops and giving attractive slogans like 'garibi hatao', with a promise to the backward sections of the society that the aæelong injustices perpetrated against them will be ended. How Mrs. Gandhi is going to fulfil these promises is difficult to understand. Though she and her party are professing socialism, they have not yet accepted the basic tenets of socialist programme such as "limit on personal expenditure", "curb on production of luxury goods", "equal type of education to all" etc. Secondly, even a limited programme cannot be implemented by an individual leader, without the participation of the masses, let alone changing the established order. A vast majority of Mrs. Gandhi's party and almost the whole of her administration, are part of the established order. Some of them, who might wish to change the present order, are so chicken-hearted that they are afraid of the instability which is inherent in a revolutionary effort. Thus both the instruments of social change, i.e. the ruling party and the bureaucracy, are incapable of redeeming the promises which Mrs. Gandhi has made

to the people. In addition, the brave and unique uprising of the people of Bangla Desh against militarism, colonisation and the mass influx of millions of refugees in our country is a new factor that adds to the magnitude of our complex problems. If the promises made out to the suffering millions are not fulfilled speedily, disillusion and discontent will spread like wildfire. This discontent has to be properly channelised if a national disaster is to be averted. It is only the socialists, in co-operation with other radical elements, who can achieve this objective.

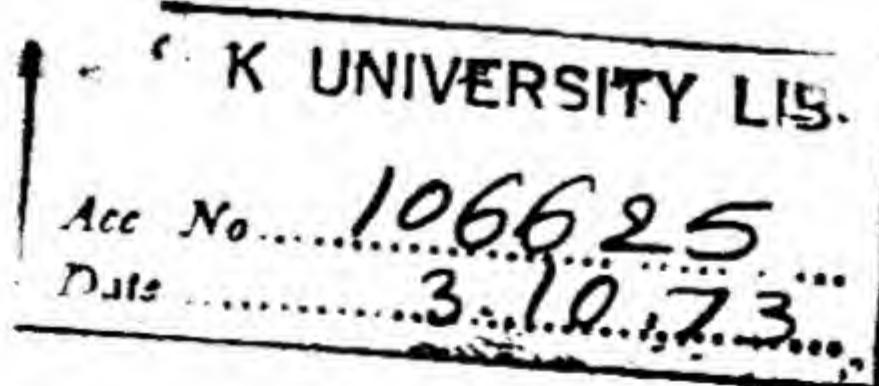
For this purpose, the socialists will have to work in opposition to the ruling party and build up a viable alternative. This does not mean that any progressive measures from the ruling party must also be opposed. That type of blind opposition will only tarnish the image of the new party. The party will have to work steadfastly in order to expose the socialist claims of the ruling party. As has been mentioned above, the ruling party is incapable of bringing about a fundamental social change. It may only try to give some partial relief to some sections of the people. Even these partial schemes will not bear the desired fruit on account of the corrupt and incompetent bureaucracy. It is here that the socialists will have to first step in. They must mobilise the people with a view to getting whatever little advantages they can from these partial schemes. In this process they will occasionally have to resort to direct action too. This I call the strategy of constructive combatism.

This strategy will not only awaken the people, but would help us win their confidence. During this process new cadres will be thrown up. The party must organise training camps for them. These camps can be the foundations of Bhoomi-Sena like organisations which alone can change the face of our villages. Selected workers from amongst them can be recruited as party activists who must be given intensive training in the theory and practice of socialist transformation.

The new party, in the coming years, must concentrate on mass work and disciplined organisation. The mass struggle which the socialists will have to launch will have two aspects; while the economic injustice could be resisted through class organisations, social injustices, such as untouchability, will have to be countered by developing organisations like the Samata Parishad into militant instruments of change. The youth in urban areas is gradually

realising the pangs of social injustice. Therefore, their organisations deserve support and guidance from the Socialist Party. It is the youth who are rising in revolt against traditionalism and inequality. The new Socialist Party must welcome this spirit and direct this upsurge towards the rural sector which is still the citadel of conservatism. The rural masses will realise the need to shed the shackles of traditionalism as their economic struggle gathers strength and momentum. This will enable them to welcome the cultural revolt of the urban youth. It will be the function of the Socialist Party to see that the two streams of urban and rural revolt coming to forge the necessary sanction for a radical transformation of the society.

Indeed the Socialist Movement had originally adopted the three point formula of spade, prison and vote for bringing about the Socialist Revolution; but after the electoral success during 1967 elections, the leadership of the movement got itself entirely involved in parliamentary activity and lost its moorings. That one-sided emphasis on office and power brought about a number of perversions in the movement. The party will have to get rid of such perversions. In that context, the present loose set up of our organisation should be substituted by a net work of party cells of disciplined and well trained workers who will devote themselves to mass work. If the new party sincerely tries to build up its organisation along these lines and concentrates more on creating mass sanctions through economic and cultural struggles, there is every reason to believe that the socialist movement will soon recover the lost ground and play its historic role in the transformation of the country's political and social structure.



ERRATA

<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
15	26	It	— Is
17	6	protest	— protect
48	30	most of them they were	— most of them were
51	28	substenance	— sustenance
116	20	man	— men
137	33	rally	— rally round
140	10	forthwith a view	— forthwith with a view
149	13	implentation	— implementation
150	12	thins	— this
160	4	forgoing	— forging
162	37	pleasantly	— peasantry
174	14	uitq	— quit
175	19	as	— an

